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THE SPLENDID CALIFORNIANS

By SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL

THE LORD OF THUNDERGATE

BOTH ONE

FOURSCORE

SWORD AND CANDLE

THE SPLENDID CALIFORNIANS

The
SPLENDID
CALIFORNIANS

By
SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL



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I

AS THE sun shot through the mist and over the eastward line of ridges, turning the lagunita de las Baulinas to a broad glinting sheet of blue and copper, señor don Estevan del Valle looked away from the vanishing sails of the *Zoraida* and for the first time actually considered the new land before him. He had thought of it many times, but never as he did now; perhaps more as nightmare than dream, and he knew that he had been correct. What he saw made him sigh. Trees . . . trees . . . trees. . . . Only the lagoon, separated from the Pacific by a sandspit, was other than green. No silvery-gray olive drowsy in heat, no apricot, no pomegranate, no shining orange, nothing but tall unknown trees, so dark, so thick, so unlike Spain, that don Estevan's face became grim. He thought that he spoke in a whisper, but his great voice rumbled over the hissing of the running surf: "We will live like monkeys in the trees . . ."

"Lo que es a paciencia . . . le gane a usted!" a voice piped clearly behind him.

Don Estevan muttered something in his black beard, and found that the dark mood was leaving him. "So I am very patient, am I?" he roared. "No one can get ahead of me in that, eh? Hilarita, I believe you would

be content to climb from tree to tree, and even hang by your tail, if you had one." He began to laugh. "I have been called many things in my life, little daughter, but I have never been called patient before!"

"You have never needed to be patient before," she assured him, sliding off a roped chest and dancing up to him. "Whatever you need to be, you are."

Don Estevan scratched his beard. "Perhaps you are right," he admitted. "Now that you mention it, I can remember the time . . ." He broke off, choked, and then shook with laughter. "You have the gift," he cried; "I was ready to believe you. It comes to me that while you lack the del Valle bellow, you think before you speak, which is a rare thing in our family."

She came almost to his shoulder; don Estevan was a big man. A heavy shawl, from the chests of the *Zoraida*, made the child seem curiously mature. Don Estevan was dressed as he would have been for a stroll in distant Seville, save that a heavy sword was belted about his waist; he had refused every offer of the ship's captain to obtain sterner garb. "If I am to be killed by *los Indios*," he had insisted, "at least I will have the satisfaction of knowing that I had the clothes proper for the occasion."

The *Zoraida* had laid in Monterey for a week, but don Estevan had remained in his cabin. Extra payment had induced the captain to put in at las Baulinas, making it unnecessary for don Estevan to stop at the mission of San Francisco Assisi, but to come, instead, as close as possible to the land which had been granted him. It was supposed, on shipboard, that del Valle

had something to hide. He did, but more from himself than from any other man.

The captain had argued with him at the last: how was señor del Valle to have his chests taken inland? Who would meet him? Don Estevan answered grandly that it had all been arranged; he was left on the semicircular beach supposing that don Estevan's friends (the Spaniard had indicated that he was well acquainted in this northern California) would soon be down to greet him.

"What we need now," don Estevan said thoughtfully, "is a house in the trees, eh, little Hilaria?"

The dark-eyed child glanced at him quickly. Let her father call her "Hilaria" and she knew that he was unhappy; Hilaria had been her mother's name, her own the diminutive Hilarita. She came close to him, a fierce protection in her attitude.

"Do you remember, my father and dearest one, how I could not go from the house in Seville, after . . . whatever happened . . ."

He said gruffly, "I suppose you know what happened?"

The girl shook her head. "I know that you came in more angry than I had ever seen you. But I know also that you had a pair of lovely coral earrings for your bad daughter, and you smiled, although you were very angry, and then you kissed me. . . ."

She clung to him; she had meant to comfort, but he groaned, "And kissed your mother. . . ." The girl lay quite still in his arms, seeming to burn in the fire which consumed him.

A little wind stirred the redwoods into dreary sound. Up in the hills a bird sang; higher, in sky so blue now that it dazzled the eyes, a condor hung motionless.

Hilarita lifted her face, and said in her shrill girl's voice, "What has happened is over. We will be like two men together, and I will help you, and we will have a little house and garden, and I will have your soft shoes ready for you at night——"

Don Estevan held her away from him gently. "If only this California is . . . what I have been told . . . I . . ." He stopped; the girl thought he was inarticulate. "Stand very still," he said, his voice throttled as low as he could hold it. "I see *los Indios*." His hand had gone to his sword-hilt.

They had not seen the Indians slip from the cover of the redwoods; on the near spit the naked savages appeared blacker, more horrible, because of the shining sand on which they trotted. Short ugly men, long of hair, and with unpainted sticks thrust through greasy locks, they sent Hilarita's heart to her throat; don Estevan's own did double-knocks against the wall of his chest. Behind the men, although the pair were unable to take their eyes from the leaders, were women, naked save for a girdle of painted tules.

Ten paces away the savages stopped. One of their number—shorter, uglier than the others, the hairs of his eyebrows plucked out—stepped forward. He said a guttural word.

Don Estevan, for lack of anything else to do, bowed. As he did so, his hand automatically came from the hilt of his sword; instantly the Indians came closer.

"So that is how it is," the Spaniard muttered.

The leader gesticulated; don Estevan smiled.

They were all armed with short bows and heavy arrows, tipped with clam-shell fragments; only a few of them had regular arrow-heads of chipped stone. The leader had a long knife tucked under one arm.

Behind his beard don Estevan's face was very white. Here was no fellow-caballero, acquainted with courtesies and pretty phrases which properly accompany even a fight to death; it came to the Spaniard that the naked man before him was unmonkey-like only in that his words—the harsh sounds he made—had meaning . . . but so, probably, had an animal's.

Had this curious meeting—this strange welcome to a new land—begun with blows, with don Estevan's great sword swinging—the Spaniard would not have had time nor desire for thought: as it was, he was able to realize what his death would have meant to Hilarita. Sheer gratitude made him shout: "*I will never hurt you, my friends!*"

The Indians leaped back at the sound of his powerful voice; an arrow whistled over his head and buried deep in the sand.

Hilarita, whiter than her father, stood stock-still.

Before don Estevan could rip his sword from its scabbard, the leader of the savages snarled a word, and then held one of his own arrows before him, dropping both bow and knife to the sand. With a rapid gesture he snapped the shaft of the arrow, letting the two pieces fall.

Don Estevan felt a cold hand slip into his. He

tightened his fingers about it reassuringly, and then understood that Hilarita was giving him something.

He thought again, "That girl may say little, but she has a head!"

To break his own sword-blade was unthinkable; he did not even care (as he had intended) to draw it and thrust the weapon into the sand. Instead, holding the string of blue beads Hilarita had taken from her neck before him, he advanced solemnly to the leader. The Indian seemed undecided; don Estevan bent and placed the bright trinket on the sand. Hardly had he straightened up before the savage pounced on the beads, flourished them, and said harshly, pointing at the pair:

"Wek-wek . . . hosoope . . . Osoo-sosoli . . ."

The bearded Spaniard bowed grandly again, believing that the Indian was thanking him: what the naked leader actually was saying was that the man had the appearance of the falcon, and that the little woman had given them a piece of the sky, as shining as the Seven Sister Stars.

"It advances, it advances," don Estevan tried to whisper to Hilarita. "Perhaps this is a good omen, eh? Now . . . by the forked tail of the devil, what are they going to do? Do they think that I have given them all the goods we possess?"

Indians swarmed about the chests; two at each end, they were lifting them, and carrying their burdens across the beaten white sand.

"We want to be taken to the rancho of señor don José Maria de la Torre," don Estevan thundered, all his earlier fears returning manifold. "I have given

you a present, but you can not make me live in a village of savages!" Since the Indians grunted and continued laboring with the loads, don Estevan cried out the louder: "I will not live with fleas and dogs. . . . Hilarita, they intend making me their king—don Antonio told me about it at the inn one night, how *los Indios* have white kings! I will not have a naked consort! How can we stop them? Set down the chests! Am I to end my days the monarch of nakedness and vermin, my throne a sleeping dog and my crown a stick shoved through my hair? Blood of blood, I——"

"Hush! Did not the captain say that the rancho of the de la Torres was near the ocean? The savages are paying us for the gift—they will take us there."

"I wish I had your assurance," her father grumbled.

When they had left the beach, and were in the red-wood forest, even the girl began to have time for trembling.

Could there be such a thing as a rancho in this land of giant trees, of dusky shade, so thick that one could not see the good sun overhead? Southward, along the coast, the brown hills, rounded, soft, had been familiar, like home; the white haciendas basking with surrounding vineyards in the warmth had seemed lovely, lovable; here were gloom, despair . . . danger.

The savages were leading them to some dark village in the trees, place of evil and devils and unhealthy things.

Don Estevan was striding ahead so grimly that the girl tried to cheer him.

"A curious people, these *Indios*," she said as lightly

as she could. "See: there are even men dressed like their women!"

"Look away from them," don Estevan said harshly. "They are another thing the good sisters at Santa Maria knew nothing about!"

"But——"

"There is one thing the sisters failed in teaching you," the white man shouted. "And that is the fact that little girls should not talk so much."

They walked in silence. Her fingers went first to his arm, then crept slowly up to the broad shoulder.

"Are you—very angry, dear one?"

Don Estevan did not look down at her, but glared along the winding path through the redwoods.

"*Very* angry?"

"So—so your mother—asked me—when I—talked like a—fool," the bearded caballero rumbled.

Her mother! Hilarita knew that she had died on the way to the *Zoraida*: how, why, she did not clearly understand, but she knew it was wrapped up in the fact that the little brother she was to have had died also. . . .

"And then," the girl said, standing on tiptoe, "she kissed you . . . like this."

Tears, sighs, a welcome arm about her: the girl expected any or all of these from don Estevan. Instead, her father flung her away roughly.

"Some one is going to pay for all this," he roared. "There is a dog I will some day drive back into his kennel—a bird whose green plumage I am going to clip, and whose neck I will wring!"

She tried to make sense from his words without success.

"It is lucky he has been able to place two oceans between us," don Estevan said, so fiercely that an Indian grunted that the man of white skin spoke like the roaring river, Wak-kah-loo, where it dashed over the face of the mountains in the time of the First People.

Her eyes growing accustomed to the cathedral dimness of the great trees, the girl began to glance about her. She cried out gaily (don Estevan, in black mood, unhearing) at the mauve and yellow and white iris; the nodding heads of scarlet and gold columbine half hidden in giant fronds of strange ferns made her fingers eager to pluck them; little starry lavender and blue blossoms, growing close to the dark rough bark of the gigantic trees, gave the still air a new recognizable perfume. Hilarita twisted her fingers through don Estevan's own: "The *yerba buena*," she said softly. "You spoke of good omens, and here we find the good herb——"

"Can you eat it?" don Estevan asked. "Will you make walls of it for a house, or change it into a horse to ride?"

"The *yerba buena*, the good fathers—one of the sisters told me—have written that this herb——"

Don Estevan dismissed the good fathers and the sisters of the convent as well with one word: "Bah!"

The way, the unseen path through the redwoods, zigzagged back and forth up the ravine. Ahead, father and daughter watched the silent naked figures of the

Indians toiling with the chests. The silence was intense, uncanny; one could see the feet of the savages come down on the soft carpet of fallen dried needles, but could never hear the sound they made. No birds sang. No light brightened the reddish trunks of these trees—trunks bigger around than the biggest cask don Estevan had ever seen or imagined.

Straight the trees grew; no branch nor bough jutted out until higher than the roof of a church; then they vaulted together, intermingled, until it was truly as if a roof covered them, and *los Indios* as well.

Through the middle of the canyon a little stream flowed swiftly, dancing down to the Pacific. Boulders, moss-covered, dark as the trees, sent white spray in veils over the darker water below. In a still pool a trout leaped, the water circling ringwise after he had gulped his insect. The sound of his sleek, shiny body as it slapped back into the pool made a huge noise in the silent forest. In a thicket of elderberry and salmon-berry (already globed with orange fruit) a deer, feeding, paused, and then sped swiftly up the far side of the ravine. A hundred feet away, and he was invisible in the darkness.

"A strange land, this California," don Estevan muttered. "We may be the first people—for these savages are hardly human, and certainly not Christians!—who have ever walked through this gloomy forest."

The silence disturbed him; he strained to see if he could hear his own footfall, and knew that he could not.

Hilarita, also, had been impressed by the gravity of

the unknown; when he spoke, however, she began to talk valiantly, partly to relieve her father, partly with the buoyancy of childhood, and even more to hear a voice again, even if only her own. Anything, everything, she spoke of: the convent and the doings of the sisters, the horse she intended to ride . . . about this, about that, until don Estevan's frown slowly smoothed.

He said, in astonishment, "Why, there are flowers in this dungeon of hopes!"

"I did not see them. Where?"

"My eyes have always been considered excellent," don Estevan told her. "Now, if you will follow my finger——"

She exclaimed at what her father pointed out, seeing again the iris and columbine; he prided himself that he had at last taken her out of her terror of the black forest, and was vastly pleased.

The way grew steeper, and took now the thinning stream at the V of the canyon. The Indians began to sweat with exertion, and the nauseating odor of their unwashed bodies fought to subdue the sweetness of redwoods, ferns, flowers, herbs. A feeble light seeped for a moment through the trees, and they could see the good blue sky above. Then (darker for the glimpse of the heavens) they were in gloom again.

"It is no wonder they were willing to give me a grant of land here," don Estevan rumbled. "Trees . . . probably seeded in hell, and witnessing no one knows what deviltry the savages can concoct . . ."

"It can not all be trees——"

Don Estevan blinked, and looked at her. He was

silent a moment, and then cleared his throat. "A man can be brave only if he is able to make a noise about it," he said vaguely. "But you . . . a child . . . well, I have never even seen you cry, but it is not very happy for you."

"You will never see me cry! I may do it, but——"

"I will not see it?" In a thick voice he added, "I never saw . . . Hilaria . . . cry."

"I am her daughter and yours," Hilarita said with the intensity of childhood. "And *you* are to be happy! You hear me? I tell you so!" She beat at his chest with a savage little fist. "What happened is over. If it has been dark in the past, just as it is dark here, there is a sun and we . . . look! The savage with the beads is trying to show us something!"

The naked Indians had stopped to rest; the chests were on the soft needle-carpet of brown. The leader indicated something don Estevan could not see, and, when the Spaniard stared at him, went through a pantomime of raising his feet and walking.

Man and girl followed him.

The trunks of the trees turned slowly from brown to brownish-red; the foliage above began to gleam; they could see at last the top of the ridge, and, lying in the sun as in ecstasy, the soft rounded breasts of the distant hills. Don Estevan, afraid to voice any satisfaction at the ending of the forest, for fear of what he might see next, had drawn his brows together; Hilarita's hand was in his, and she was forced to run to keep up with his long nervous strides.

Hands shading eyes from the beat of the sun, they

looked over the top of the ridge. What they saw made them both tremble; don Estevan's breath was exhaled in a gigantic sigh. Hilarita, smiling excitedly, smiled. "Ah!" the bearded Spaniard said, and no other word.

II

A BROAD valley, green with grass and dotted with fat cattle, rolling clear to the far hills . . . bright fruit-trees, some still in blossom . . . the dark shine of the orange . . . slender sticks throwing thin shadows, where the grapes were growing . . . and the sun. The sun!

How good it was to feel its happy warmth again!

A low white hacienda, from which curling smoke rose . . . horses standing before it . . . a dog barking furiously . . . a home . . . a home of white men.

Don Estevan turned at last, and said, "I am not much of a hand at praying, but I have seldom felt as I do now. A—a paradise, Hilarita!"

"I told you!" the girl said vehemently. Then, as the Indians appeared at the ridge with the chests, "And I am to have a horse for my own! I am! And when I say, 'I go to ride!' I need ask no permission, and——"

"Not so fast, not so fast," don Estevan bellowed. "Am I to be nothing in this land? You need ask no permission, eh? And . . . I see a man coming from the hacienda! See! He waves his hat! It must be don José . . . let us walk rapidly . . ."

He was a smaller, slighter man than del Valle; he

half ran to meet the strangers. A boy trotted at his side, while the dog whirled about them both.

"Don Estevan! Don Estevan!" he called, even before the two men were able to clasp hands, or the children to do more than eye each other in shy appraisal, "we heard from a messenger from Monterey that you were coming, but we expected you by *balsa* from San Francisco Assisi . . . ay! but we are glad to have you as a neighbor; it has been very lonely for my poor little wife . . . this will be a great year, this 1816! For not only are you here, but there is soon to be a mission founded, and named, I believe, for good San Rafael Arcangel . . . A man"—he ended—"grows tired of none save Tah-mahs to talk with; you must excuse me, don Estevan."

A bright scarlet sash circled de la Torre's middle, a smaller one was about his silent son.

"Remember what your mother told you, Ricardo," don José said, so swiftly and earnestly that don Estevan smothered a grin in his beard.

The boy bent stiffly, mumbling something none could hear.

Don José smiled. "He has lived all of his life here," he apologized, "but he has tried to say what I say also, don Estevan: our house is yours."

Del Valle bowed; the formula, used wherever Spaniards welcome their countrymen, did not excite him. The sight of Ricardo, dumb, uncomfortable, however, set him to laughing.

"Be careful, little Ricardo," he advised, winking at don José. "This Hilarita of mine delights in leading

people about by the nose, and, while yours is not full grown, she can get her fingers on it easily enough!"

He was all noise and high spirits now; he laughed prodigiously when Hilarita whispered that Ricardo's nose was safe enough.

"You hear her?" he cried. "When she appears uninterested, Ricardo, that is the time to watch out! I know her, and she is . . . well . . . look out!"

Ricardo, unsmiling, looked up at the stranger.

"I would not mind . . . if señorita 'Rita cared to . . . pull my nose," he said gravely.

Hilarita sniffed, but the two men roared with laughter.

"We had better go to the hacienda," don José said, when he was able to talk again. "My wife is waiting anxiously, don Estevan, and . . ."

"It is better not to keep her waiting, eh?"

Don José shrugged.

"You will see how it is with me," he said. "Well, when your hacienda is built, invite me to visit you often, don Estevan——"

"Consider it done," the other assured him. "But how does one go about building? Does one say a magic word, and then the walls spring up from the earth?"

"From the earth expresses it, don Estevan. But . . . you are thirsty and hungry. However . . . if . . . you see, don Estevan, if my wife asks more than you care to answer . . ."

Don Estevan pulled at his beard.

"Don José," he said gravely, "pattern yourself on

me, and you will see how to handle women. Now I . . . h'm . . . did you hear any one snort, don José?"

Hilarita's face was very prim; when the two men (don Estevan chuckling, don José thinking what curiously delightful people the del Valles were) turned and set out toward the hacienda, she followed demurely enough with Ricardo.

The two children walked silently, although the men were never still; once Ricardo pointed to a dark patch under a distant tree, saying that his horses were there, and repeating that they were hers also.

"How many have you?" she asked.

"A *caponera*."

"What is that?"

"Twenty-five."

"I will have two *caponeras*!"

The boy nodded.

"Or perhaps three . . . or four!"

Ricardo did not appear at all impressed.

"If we have a hundred horses, I can ride them all," the girl insisted. She added, "How many horses has your father?"

The boy said calmly, "He does not know. Perhaps a thousand. Or even two."

She sniffed, believing that he was playing the same game; Ricardo, not given to fencing, told the truth.

Don José's broad Peruvian hat, his short jacket of blue cloth, adorned with gold filigree buttons, beneath which a vest of the same material was similarly ornamented, his soft deerskin leggings and shoes, colored

orange and stamped with arabesques, his blue *poncho* of broadcloth, were all repeated in diminutive on Ricardo; he might have been a smaller don José; his face, however, differed greatly from his father's nervously serene one. His eyes danced the words his mouth did not utter; his mouth was firm and straight. The skin of his face had been burned dark by the sun; beside him, Hilarita seemed the color of warmed ivory.

The girl, stepping primly beside him (as the sisters had taught her), asked: "Are you afraid of *los Indios*, don Ricardo?"

Only those same Indians addressed him so cavalierly.

The boy shrugged, looked down, and then half turned toward the girl.

"Of some of them," he said quietly.

Hilarita's eyes shone. "I saw a caballero fight four men at once," she said. "It was in Seville, and the girls from Santa Maria were walking . . . *that* man would not be afraid of any savages." She was watching Ricardo narrowly. "Why, even I was not very afraid of them, when they brought us here."

"There is no sense in being afraid of them. Why, when they made me watch their dance, when I was alone at the rancho, and when a chief of the Olompalis tried to frighten me by throwing an ax——"

"*Verdad?*"

"As true as the miracles!"

"What did don José say when you told him?"

"What good would that have done?" the boy countered.

"Take me to see *los Indios* dance!"

Ricardo's mouth opened and shut. "I believe you would like to see it," he said. He looked away from her, and then said solemnly, "I know where there is a snake the like of which you have never seen before. He has buttons on his tail, and when he is angry, he shakes them. Would you like to see him?"

Hilarita opened wide her black eyes, which don Estevan had said would cause much havoc before very long.

"Show me the snake?" she asked.

The boy nodded briefly. He did not yet understand; his mother had said that the Señorita Hilarita del Valle was a great lady, even if still a girl; that he must remember all the things she had instructed him in; to bow, to advance the foot, to sweep the hat from the head, to do a hundred things of which he could not recall a dozen . . . and here was a companion who was interested in rattling snakes and horses and savages. . . .

"I will show you better things than the snake," he promised.

"Only—remember the apple and the garden of Eden and *el diablo* himself," don Estevan called back, over-hearing the last words.

"When we have a padre here, it will be paradise indeed," don José laughed.

Don Estevan chuckled.

"And your wife will visit him twice a week, and give you a little peace, eh?"

"I was not thinking of that . . . but it will give her one less thing to argue about. She misses people, and the comfort of the Church, and——"

"Her mother!"

"How did you know?"

Don Estevan said quietly, "I had none of that trouble myself, but I saw what happened to my friends. . . . Is that señora de la Torre at the hacienda?"

"It is. And I hope Ricardo had the sense to keep his hands clean. . . . Well, Luisa"—raising his voice—"here is don Estevan, come by boat and over the trail from the ocean."

"Did I think he dropped from the sky like a saint?" señora de la Torre asked. To don Estevan she bowed deeply. "It is a great honor you pay us, don Estevan," she said. "If we had known you were coming this day, I would have had José bring horses to carry you . . . he should have thought of it, but leaves the thinking to me . . . and you are hungry . . . and there is your daughter, standing, and tired, and lonely . . . and——"

"Manuel! Tomas! 'Nastacio! 'Dlario! Francisca! Ysabel! The servants are never where one wants them"—a fact don Estevan doubted, since white-gowned Indian women and leather-clad men-servants swarmed from around the hacienda—"and all because José is too easy with them!"

She gave a dozen orders at once: where was the cool white wine? was the food ready? bring the chests inside! have cold water for the little lady!

She turned fiercely on the staring wild Indians.

"Touch nothing!" she said in their own language.—
"And you—you with the clam-shells around your

neck—come here! You are to live at the rancho, Tahmah! Go and get clothing. You are a strong man, and we need you. All of you,” she said, her voice shriller, and her plump body shaking with vehemence, “are more than paid by the beads your chief wears, but if you go behind the house you will be fed. . . .

“Get them away,” she said, her handkerchief coming delicately to her nose, and prodding at don José; “they sicken me. And señorita Hilarita must be frightened at so many savages.” She smiled at the girl. “Do not be frightened, little ’Rita. They will not hurt you. We will not let them.”

Ricardo said, half under his breath, “No; we will not let them!”

They all heard him. Hilarita turned rosy red; don José struggled to keep from smiling; del Valle shouted gleefully.

Señora de la Torre, more crimson than the girl, said to her husband: “That is what this land has done to my baby, José. The boy is like a savage! He needs to go to the *colegio* for several years, to learn what is right among *gente de razón*. He needs . . . What did you say, Ricardo?”

The youngster, eyes on the earth, had muttered that he would go to no school; since all waited for him to speak, he blurted out the last thing he intended to say. “I have promised to show señorita ’Rita a snake,” he told them, hot to the ears.

The girl, tortured as he was, whirled to face him.

“You are a savage!” she cried. “Did I ever say I wanted to see . . . creeping things?”

Ricardo was learning a lesson: he was an apt pupil. He said sadly, "No, señorita."

Don Estevan bit his lip. He was about to roar something in his great voice, but, instead, he placed his hand on the youngster's shoulder.

"Would you like to try this sword of mine?" he asked.

Ricardo smiled up at the tall del Valle, but before he could answer señora de la Torre said, "Some other time, don Estevan. The child, to be sure, knows *nothing*, neither about manners nor swords nor anything else. But come inside . . . our house is yours . . . he knows nothing, and he is difficult to teach, I can assure you, since José will not——"

"He has learned one lesson," don Estevan said. "It took me many years, and a fight or two, but he has it pat!"

She said uneasily, "You are laughing at us, don Estevan."

"*Que me he de reir!* . . . I, laugh? I should say not! It may be a serious business . . ."

Hilarita, knowing her father better than the others, was grateful when he preceded don José into the great main room of the hacienda.

Cool white walls, a floor of some unknown stony material, on which blankets had been placed as covering; a long bare table, chairs brought from Spain or Mexico. Before the girl had time to do more than glance around servants brought silver cups filled with fragrant wine.

Don José raised his own vessel: "We are glad—you

are at—el rancho de la punte del Monte,” he said jerkily. “It is—a pleasure . . . Luisa, what did you say came next?”

Don Estevan managed to refrain from laughter.

Seeing how angry the excitable señora de la Torre was becoming, he himself rose from his chair.

“It seems to be the custom to give the ranchos names,” he said suavely. “I do not know where mine is—save that it exists, and is near your own, don José—but we must give it a name. Think of this, my friends: I have been hopeless for many months, but seeing your happiness, your broad valleys and cattle and contentment, I find I have hope again. So the new rancho is to be . . . Buena Esperanza . . . good hope.”

He drained his cup.

“Delicious,” he bowed to señora de la Torre. “From Spain?”

“Our own grapes—and what a task it was to have them properly tended you will never know.”

“The bouquet is remarkable . . . I must have some similar vines, don José. Where did you get them?”

“From—some one; I do not remember who. We will give you all you need; they grow like weeds in this land.”

Don Estevan said quietly, “I thank you, don José. But the del Valle purse is not empty, although”—grimly and bitterly—“there are some who tried to drain it for us. I am glad that I may pay you, at least in part, for what you so kindly offer. No matter what payment is made, it can not cover your generosity.”

Don José looked and was excitedly angry.

"In Spain," he said, "one says, 'my house is yours,' and it is a pretty way of saying something of no meaning. But, don Estevan, this is not Spain. Nor is it Mexico, although from what I hear . . .

"This is California. What we say, we mean. Vines—do you know how many I have, nor how many savages tend them? No? Neither do I. How many cattle feed in the valleys and roam the hills? Ask Luisa—even she can not tell you. Horses . . . when a caballero rides in—seldom enough here, but often in the south—he takes fresh ones away with him. It is the custom.

"I do not boast, don Estevan. Why should I? What we have came from the good God. This house is made from earth, from water and a little wild hay from the fields. A dozen years ago, I had only fifty animals . . . now there are thousands. Mine? Perhaps. But who caused them to increase so rapidly? Don Estevan, you are to be my friend. Let us have no more talk of money. Should I ever need gold, I would take it from you willingly. But *now*, what I have is yours.

"This is a paradise, and there are only too few of us to enjoy it." He paused, and then began afresh, "Besides——"

"You do not say it badly," señora de la Torre admitted grudgingly. "What is the strange part is that you are making it up out of your own head, instead of my drilling you——"

Don José waved her silent.

"I know you want to start on your own hacienda,

don Estevan. All of my *Indios* are ready to begin work. There are details to consider, naturally, and we will get at them while waiting for *almuerzo*."

"I am as hungry as a chained bear," don Estevan smiled. "But just the same I am anxious to have work started on my—on Buena Esperanza."

"We will leave you to talk," don José's wife said, annoyed that don Estevan did not include her in the conversation. "Hilarita, come to the room you are to have as long as you can stay here, and we will have your chest opened."

"May I—do something—first?" the girl asked.

"This is your house, little one."

"I should like"—calmly—"to see something."

The two men looked up; Ricardo, standing behind his father, began to shift his weight from foot to foot.

Señora de la Torre pinched the girl's smooth cheek.

"Whatever you want," she agreed. "Now—tell me what it is."

Hilarita said, very low, "I want to see a snake with buttons."

Ricardo, not even the forbidding presence of his mother holding him longer in check, gasped, choked, and then fled wildly from the room. Through the open door Hilarita could see him running swiftly toward the hills, never stopping to look back. She smiled at señora de la Torre; the astonished matron staring at her in amazement.

"I will see it some other time," Hilarita continued placidly. "It will keep."

Luisa de la Torre glared at the suffocating men; doubly angry because she did not understand.

"There are some snakes who wear gold buttons," she cried, looking squarely at don José. "What nonsense is this? Come, child; come with me. . . ."

When they were alone, don José said sorrowfully, "Luisa will get the truth out of the girl. I never was able to keep a secret from her yet."

Don Estevan smiled broadly, and settled back contentedly in his chair.

"She is about to get her first disappointment," he said. "The snake will die of old age before that daughter of mine tells her!"

III

“‘MONTEREY, November 17th, 1778:—Don Fernando Rivera y Moncado, Captain, Comandante of this presidio and that of San Diego, by the authority of His Majesty (whom God preserves), and by virtue of the superior orders in my possession, verify an official communication, at the request of the Reverend Father Junipero Serra, Presidente of the Missions, by which Corporal Francisco Salzorano is to be granted eight leagues of land, as measured from north to south and from east to west by stakes placed in each corner, leaving the said Salzorano and his wife, Margarita Maria, in Royal and legitimate possession of the land, and permitting them to dispose of the land by sale or contract properly approved. This I do in virtue of the authority conferred on me by His Excellency señor don Antonio Bucareli y Ursua, Viceroy, Governor and Captain-General of this Kingdom.

“‘Wherefor I supplicate the Justices of His Majesty that may succeed me that they may hold and recognize, for all time, this possession as legitimate and valid, and that they may consider as expressed all the formalities and requisities that the laws provide. In order that it may now and for ever hereafter have its due validity, force and strength, I sign it with two witnesses, with whom I act, for want of a Royal Public Notary, and on this ordinary paper, for want of that which bears seal.

“‘Fernando de Rivera y Moncado.’ ”

“And I bought it from this Salzorano for one piece

of gold, a suit of clothes, and a cup of brandy to bind the bargain . . . and it was more than he deserved! He lived with *los Indios*, for one thing, and, for another, I could have had all the adjacent land for the asking. But it is a legal grant, and I saved time," don José concluded, "and I am a little soft of heart, I suppose. It pleases me to think that don Fernando himself had a hand in it."

"He is—or was—as much a man as any king," del Valle agreed. "Only they did not know it at the time."

"I heard the story of don Fernando from señor don Ramon de la Cuesta in Monterey. He is very much a man also, although an old one. When all is peaceful, the officials let him tell stories to their children, but when there is trouble—a fight, a killing by the savages, do the authorities send out one of their gold-laced soldiers? *That* is when there is a great excitement, and the officials themselves polish up don Ramon's sword for him. He is gone a week or so with a few soldiers as old as himself . . . and then the trouble is over.

"Well, your grant"—they had already read it over—"has more seals on it than mine, but it is no more legal, for all the king's name. We will ride over and see it, and you can watch the men start to crush rock and clay for the hacienda. We should have a rough plan, don Estevan——"

Del Valle raised his head.

"Why not like your own?" he asked.

"Good! We say, then, a room like this, and a bed-

room for yourself; one for your daughter; and one . . . two . . . three . . . for guests. Then, a kitchen, away from the house, and storehouses also . . .”

“And a place for my flowers,” Hilarita, entering, requested.

“Are we to be gardeners?” don Estevan shouted. “Am I to dig in the ground to grow flowers for silly girls? Are there not enough on the hills and in the valley?”

“She should have one little place for them,” señora de la Torre snapped. “There is little enough happiness for women here, don Estevan, and——”

In a terrible voice don Estevan bawled, “No flowers, and no place for them. Not one inch! Not one flower!”

While don José’s wife summoned up an argument, Hilarita slid up on her father’s knee.

“Thank you, dear one,” she said.

Don Estevan began to laugh. “Not one flower,” he repeated, and laughed again.

His face was still twisted with mirth when servants brought doña Luisa’s best linen and silver; hot food was carried in, and don Estevan cried out honestly at the abundance.

“We have eaten dried and salted meat until I have turned to a herring,” he exclaimed. “A land of plenty, this California . . .” and went to work.

The meal was half over when Ricardo sidled into the room.

Before señora de la Torre could snap at him, don

Estevan, unthinking, shouted, "Love is a great thing, but, fortunately for their growth, it has never yet interfered with the appetite of the young!"

Doña Luisa's lips came together in a firm line.

"H'm!" she said.

"Exactly," don Estevan agreed. "Doña Luisa, you and I understand each other. You have a soft heart, and that is why you try to appear unsympathetic. Do not try to tell me differently. I am a man of the world, and I know."

She smoothed her dress. "I wish my husband had your sense," she said.

Apartadores had a dozen horses ready and saddled, and when the meal was over don Estevan cried, "Are we a regiment? Do we need all of this to investigate the land?"

"Select the animal which pleases you. They are all yours now, and I will have a *caponera* ready for you, when the time comes. In a few years, you will have hundreds on the hills."

Don Estevan's eyes lighted. "I will ride the black," he decided. "There is no one in the world who loves a horse better than I, unless it is Juan Estrada . . . and where he is none of us knows. A real man, is Juan. He can ride, and use the sword, like the devil himself. By the hole into which they thrust the cross, but he is a brave man. You know him? No? I heard once that he came to California also." He added in a low voice, "It was only a political matter, don José; you know what politics are."

Don José, not knowing, nodded sagely.

The two men were riding across the valley, the grass clear to the horses' knees, before the ranchero of del Monte said timidly, "Do you think it would do any good if I yelled at Luisa as you do?"

"It is too late for that now," don Estevan informed him solemnly. He patted the little man's shoulder. "There is nothing for you but patience."

Don José sighed.

Behind them, wordless, the boy and girl rode. Doña Luisa had remained at the hacienda, after one protest—overruled by don Estevan—concerning women riding alone. The two had much to say, and so were (as yet) speechless. Hilarita rode high in the ornamented saddle; Ricardo, Indianwise, moved with the swaying of the horse.

At last don Estevan could see a circular piece of ground, about an acre in size, fenced with irregular slabs of redwood. This ground had been pounded level, and was hard and firm. From several places in the enclosure Indians threw grain to the earth, and almost a hundred mares, driven by *apartadores*, swung clockwise about the *era*. The men urged the animals with loud cries—"Yegua . . . yegua . . ." and when the mares became dizzy from circling in one direction, turned them and started the circling counter-clockwise.

"It is crude, but that is the way we do it here," don José said. "We winnow by waiting for a windy day; we push the threshed grain to one side of the *era*, and then throw it into the air. The chaff and straw blows away, and the heavier grain falls to the earth. The padres taught me."

"How much grain will you get?"

"I will not bother to discover," don José shrugged. "There is always more than enough." He pointed suddenly. "Do you see that tree with the red smooth bark and the shining leaves? A *madroña*. There . . . where the hills begin. That marks the end of this rancho, and——"

"The beginning of Buena Esperanza!"

As all rode into the valley on the far side of the eastward hills, don Estevan's thoughts were answered by his companion.

"We will start to build the hacienda to-morrow," don José told him. "We start, but you must have what you advised for me—patience. It takes time for the adobe to dry. I . . . I am happy to have you here, don Estevan!"

It was on del Valle's tongue to say that he, also, was at least not unhappy. Don José, kind, generous, would be a good friend and a real caballero, but could he make up for Juan Estrada, for Andres del Valle, for . . . Hilaria, who was dead! Don Estevan's mobile face darkened. Dead, and unrevenged. In her gentle way Hilaria would not have cared about vengeance; those men who would have despoiled the del Valles—all in the name of politics—she would have forgiven, and blessed to boot. . . .

Hilaria . . . dead. He remembered the time he sat in the room in her father's house, stiff with finery, while she herself sat primly in the corner, guarded by two maiden aunts and a *duenna* as well . . . and then she in his arms . . . and the coming of Hilarita . . .

A splendid land, this California of Spain, but what use had he for splendor? His seething head sent his hand to the hilt of his sword; he looked out vacantly at the lovely valley and the gentle slopes of the hills.

Ah-wet-che, the crow, cawed in a tree; an invisible Tah-mah mocked him so perfectly that none save Ricardo knew the difference: Ricardo knew that the long-drawn-out sound, repeated thrice, told any savages within earshot that white men were about, and that the message would be carried, in caw after caw, clear to the mountains. He trembled a little at the coincidence that the first cry had come from an actual crow.

Hilarita's hand slipped into don Estevan's: "You remember what I commanded in the forest," she said, her slender figure trembling with earnestness.

Don Estevan slowly released his grip on the sword-hilt. He looked at Hilarita tenderly; how very like Hilaria the girl was becoming; how understanding, how true and dear to him. What he said he would have said to her who so controlled, dominated gently, his memory: "You would do anything to make me happy!" He did not say it in surprise, nor as a question; he merely thought aloud.

"Anything?" The girl came closer to him. "If only I might have the chance to do one little, little thing . . . but you are such a brave father, and so wise, that there will never be any opportunity. . . . I need you, dearest one, but you do not need me. . . ."

Don Estevan stifled a groan. A thousand things he wanted desperately to say came to him one after another; how her own courage and loyalty made him

actually the same. Knowing that don José and Ricardo were looking carefully at nothing in the valley, he roared instead:

“You see how she gets around me, caballeros! At last she has persuaded me to allow her”—what? then, in great relief—“to grow a few flowers at Buena Esperanza!”

IV

THERE had been an early fog hanging in the valleys, but it was gone; the last dispersing clouds of it made the patches of scrub oak and madroña a delicate violet-gray, and dimmed the outlines of the thick clumps of laurel; like an Indian's head-dress it topped the red-woods.

The valley, now the rancho of Buena Esperanza, for all the hacienda was still in the building, was no longer deserted and silent. From Ricardo de la Torre's place of vantage on the ridge, he could hear, westward, the dull sound of axes cutting into the trunks of giant redwoods, and, higher, the whine of a long saw pulled back and forth by chained *Indio* sawyers, men declared by their own tribe to be possessed of devils, and condemned to be chained all of their lives. Four of them—two at each end—had been released from the saw-pit of the de la Torre rancho for the first time in many years, and, nearer the new rancho, were sweating at their monotonous work.

A *carreta*, cumbersome, creaking, its wheels made of rounds of redwood-trunk, pulled hand-split logs slowly up the lowest point in the dividing ridge, after the Indians had cut them into six-inch poles. Tah-mah women, less silent than their men, were gathering the twigs of the willow, which, wound tightly together,

would make the first roof of the new hacienda, to be replaced, later, with red tile.

Stone and clay had already been mixed together and crushed; the wet adobe blocks were slowly baking in the sun—great bricks over a foot long and six inches thick. The outlines of the future hacienda was indicated by shallow excavations, into which the adobe bricks would be set.

The boy could see where his father, don Estevan, and the other two rancheros of the district were talking together—both Englishmen. Ricardo knew that one of them, Sanderson, had been a sea-captain and a pilot, and had been given his rancho—Saucelito—from where one could see the soldiers of the presidio across the bay drill, for his services. The other, don Arturo—Arthur Wayne—the boy knew even better, since he had none of the taciturnity of the old seaman. Wayne had told and taught him many, many things (some without doña Luisa's approval); not the least of these was how the English fought (in fun, if you can imagine it!) with one's own fists! Ricardo had been an eager pupil. Although he was slight, he was very quick, and the snap of his blows more than once made the rawboned Englishman grin with delight; Ricardo, he said, in ten years more would lay a man out quicker with his fists than any other Californian could with his knife. Had there been any other Spaniard, save a chance guest, to tell Ricardo tales of the sword, he probably would have considered such methods of settling difficulties as crude, and not to be practised by a caballero.

He tried this new mode of fighting with Tah-mah boys, but always came home in a terrible state, since the Indians, once one of their number was whipped, always swarmed over him all at once. What don Arturo called a fair fight was something the savages plainly did not understand.

It was fighting that Ricardo thought of now—of the great don Ricardo scattering thousands of *los Indios* and rescuing . . . Hilarita.

The girl gave him little encouragement: "When I am a lady," she once said, "I will return to Spain and marry at least a captain——"

To which he had retorted scornfully that no captain would dance with a girl who had learned by watching savages.

The last was true: they had once slipped from the hacienda at night, and had watched the flames leap while the shadowy figures of the Tah-mahs bounded over them, and the horrid odor of scorched flesh became a terrifying stench in their nostrils. They had heard the clam-shells rattle in time to the stamping of the Indians, and (unknowing) clasped hands when the thump of the drum made their pulses bound. The orgy was no more to them than forbidden excitement, doubly sweeter for that. When the savages began to slip away into the forest, two by two, the children departed hastily.

Ricardo, on the ridge, waited until the rancheros, Hilarita beside don Estevan, began to ride; seeing them all return together, he touched his horse and rode swiftly back alone. Don Estevan teased him without mercy

whenever the boy tried to claim that the meetings were chance (and was none the less worshiped by the lad).

The establishment of a new rancho, in 1816, was no longer the difficult task of fifty years before. California had advanced swiftly. The early labors of the Franciscans were bearing opulent fruit.

Don José, at del Monte, had Indians who had been trained at the missions; he had an expert carpenter, who was making square-cut tables and chairs for Buena Esperanza, and even ornamenting them with crude scallops; he had men who prepared the lumber from the redwoods and spruce for fences, *carretas*, wine-vats, boxes. A squat Indian from San Carlos mission, stopping at del Monte for food, had remained, and he, a blacksmith carefully taught by the fathers, was able to make not only anvils and plow-points and hinges and hoes, but also such delicate bits as spurs and scissors and keys; when he was full of deer-meat, he would even hammer out bowls of copper for doña Luisa.

The *apartadores* themselves, besides cunningly training the horses, braided their own ropes, and made their own saddles, although another Indian ornamented the leather with beaten silver.

The rancheros ate their own beef or elk or deer; their grain came from their own fields; the wine on the table had been pressed from purple and red and white grapes on the sunny slopes; fruit, in a hundred varieties, grew in the orchards, and wild berries—sand-strawberries of huge size and brilliant color, blackberries in great thickets, salmon-berries, thimble-berries, huckleberries—were to be gathered for only the labor.

Doña Luisa herself directed the *cholas*. The women had always been the seed-gatherers and the burden-bearers; now they were taught to weave and to sew, even to make intricate lace. They did the cooking and cared for the hacienda, under señora de la Torre's watchful eyes.

The walls of Buena Esperanza, after the adobe bricks had dried for a month in the sun, had been set in place, and cemented together. Rafters of redwood held the roof, and, until the tiles were ready, interlaced willow twigs made temporary cover. Thick wooden shutters swung out from barred windows. The door (don Estevan was very proud of its tremendous weight) was studded with iron rosettes; it was a great day when it was properly hung.

Don Estevan stood with one leg on either side of the threshold. "We will have a little celebration," he declared. "A *baile*, eh? And Hilarita will lead the dance with . . . me." He looked sadly at the girl. "No, I am too old; I will be out of it. Who will she dance with?" Out of the corner of his eye he watched Ricardo.

"With some gay officer from the presidio," Hilarita said demurely.

Del Valle felt sorry for the plagued boy, but was unable to remain silent. "That is how it goes. Let a man covered with gold lace appear, and we simple *rancheros* have no chance. Well, some of the officers will be married, and have daughters, and the daughters will want to dance, perhaps. There is one officer in particular who has a lovely child, and I have heard that

she dances like the maids of the fountain at home would dance if they were not made of stone. I believe, however, that she wears more clothes—and probably the very latest fashion. Ricardo will have a glorious time——”

“I hope she comes of a good family,” don José said.

Don Estevan said disgustedly, “Bah!” and would have said more, but observed that boy and girl were carefully avoiding each other’s eyes. At this he prodded the overmeek don José with his elbow. “Arrange it, arrange it,” he cried. “Ricardo, poor boy, needs a little fun. It——”

“If he dances with her, I will give him something not funny,” Hilarita flamed.

“You may dance with handsome officers, but *he*——”

Ricardo’s head went high. “She likes to tease me,” he said, in defense of the impending attack upon Hilarita by her father, “but what she means is very different.”

Hilarita whirled on him. “It is? *Si siempre fué un adoquin!* Let me tell you, little blockhead, little savage, that I meant exactly what I said! I would not dance with you if you were the only . . . *child* who lived in both Californias!”

The gale of don Estevan’s understanding laughter caused both youngsters to flee; by diverse routes they sped across the floor of the valley. Don Estevan, leaning against the door-post, appeared unconcerned. He saw, nevertheless, that at last their paths coincided.

“They will be babies for a long time,” he said. “But you see how it is with them.”

"Let them settle it to their own satisfaction," don José muttered. "Ah . . . it was different with me. I went with a friend to visit the girl he was to marry. You know how it is; we sat and sat, and the girl's sister was in the room . . . and the sister was Luisa. . . . I was really married before I knew what it was all about."

When they were on the ridge again, returning for the evening meal to del Monte, don Estevan reined his horse, at the point from which Ricardo had earlier watched the erection of the hacienda. The roots of a redwood clawed into a cliff, below which a stream, thick with fern, ran for a little while before meandering into the valley. He could see the hills, the darker line of violet shadow, and, lower, the growing walls of Buena Esperanza. He did not believe he had ever seen such peace. (In Seville, at that moment, a bravo was hacking the life from a silken stripling for more than his purse, three or four heretic friars were being hustled to a burning, a band of gypsies were being driven from an inn without their younger women; there was perfumed plot and counterplot.) Here, the glory of the land, good hope, and peace. California.

From the northernmost rancho to the desert there was peace. Herds increased. The savages knelt at mass. The padres went happily about their labors. The wealth of the rancheros was uncountable and uncounted. The mimuli opened their yellow stars in the north, and the cacti their many-pointed crimson and scarlet and carmine ones in the south. The orange, heavy-sweet with fragrance, blossomed and fruited at

the same time, like nothing in either Spain or the Hesperides. The birds, since the marriage-month was not yet over, sang in furious ecstasy, and the younger rancheros sang before other haciendas than their own. Ramon de la Cuesta, survivor of the massacre at mission Purisima Concepcion, found that the brightness of his sword-blade had been dimmed from long periods in the scabbard. . . . California, last and most glorious province of Spain, waved over nightly by sunsets of yellow and red like the protective banner of Spain, was at peace.

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V

THE hills had been burned mulatto-tan by the sun. Only the trees, the grasses about the springs, the thick ferns bordering every stream, showed grateful color. The first rain of the winter had not yet fallen—a rain which would quicken the soil with incredulous rapidity. The sky was vacant. About the twin cones of the mountain sacred to the Tah-mahs no cloud wavered, but a curious darkness seemed beyond the peaks.

Don Estevan stood in the doorway of Buena Esperanza, calling, "It is going to rain!"

"Are you afraid of a wetting or of the good fathers?" Hilarita's voice answered.

"There is much to be said on both sides!" Don Estevan began to laugh. "When you go to confession, you will have a story to tell which will take an hour."

"And when you go, we will not see you again for a week!"

Don Estevan called into the house hastily, "I see don José and doña Luisa. Put on your best manners with your best dress, baby. When they are here, it is remarkable what a dutiful daughter you become——"

The girl dashed from the house.

"You are not to tease me so," she cried. "What do I care for don José and doña Luisas?"

"Or Ricardos?"

"Or Ricardos, stupid one!"

A year, and the half of a second, had shot Hilarita up like the stalk of a flower. She was not yet as tall as her father, but already topped his shoulder. The sun had left her skin untanned, and still as creamy as in the convent in Seville. Free from restraint, treated by don Estevan as a companion, she had grown (in mind as well as inches) confident, assured, like any boy.

Buena Esperanza's herds had already doubled; in the spring their size would be even greater. Out-buildings had been added. Don Estevan, tirelessly, had made the rancho fruitful in the shortest possible time. His Indians had been taught by don José's own servants. He himself had trained three boys to ride and care for the horses; he had found the youngsters while skirting the base of the mountain, tied hand and foot (and properly laid it to some devil-custom of the Tah-mahs) and brought them back to be fed, which they needed, and clothed, which they needed also.

He never bothered to name them; when he called all three appeared.

Doña Luisa rode sedately to the hacienda; she waited imperiously until servants lifted her down, and then swung on don José with: "Don Estevan's *cholos* are properly trained, but ours . . . oh, don Estevan, this is a great day for us all!"

"I think it will rain," del Valle said.

"Rain? And ruin my lace? But . . . with padres and officials waiting for us, even a flood will not stop me."

Don Estevan said gravely, "Nothing will stop you, doña Luisa."

Both preceded and followed by servants, all, including a silent Ricardo, took the eastward trail. The sky was clear overhead, but to the south and west it was darkening. Short pale winter shadows turned the earth to gray.

Twice the dreaded señor don Ricardo de la Torre saved the little party from a savage attack; once el señor don Ricardo de la Torre rescued señorita del Valle from the descent of the most terrible eagle ever seen on this earth . . . from this (as he rode) he went on to a more pressing affair. He knew that Buena Esperanza was prepared for a fiesta; well, when it came time to dance, he would advance to Hilarita, and bow, and (if only he had one!) touch his sword, and she would say, "A pleasure, don Ricardo," and he would take her hand, and . . . what would happen next he was afraid to guess. Suppose she said, "I do not dance with children" . . . what then?

For moments he was miserable; then, seeing a curious Tah-mah watching the party, he became the stern and forbidding soldier again, and, at the head of his men, accomplished another mission of rescue.

Hilarita's own thoughts were not warlike, but tumultuous just the same. She was hoping that the *cholas* had properly dressed her; wondering if there would really be officers and how they would greet her—as the child she was, or the lady she was about to become. Into this Ricardo was weaved, but his pattern dimmed as she excitedly imagined the bowing uniformed men. Doña Luisa's stream of words pattered off her ears unheard.

At last the narrow path, half indicated in the grass, broadened, and they descended into a valley, as wide as that of Buena Esperanza. To the east the bay of San Pablo was already turning to sleek slate under the graying sky.

Don Estevan was glad for the promise of rain. He supposed, without greatly caring, that it might hold off until the padres had completed their ceremonies. It would be good to see the green grass again; after the rain would come gay flowers; calves would be born; colts would prance like stiff-legged toys; the sun, soon, would become hot and strong and Buena Esperanza's orchards heavy with fruit; then the autumn, and, again, the rain. He spoke his thoughts: "The scheme of the good God could not be improved upon."

Don José agreed that they had cause to be contented. Softly as he had spoken, doña Luisa overheard him. "You are too contented, too satisfied," she said. "You——"

"You are setting a bad example to Hilarita," don Estevan said very courteously. "You talk too much."

As the riders approached—doña Luisa chirping into her husband's ear—soldiers from the presidio at San Francisco Assisi were fastening a crossbeam to two posts, and when this was in place raised two great bells and a smaller one to the beam. The tongues had been tied, for the rancheros heard no sound. The *soldados* wore the leather-jacket—the *cuera*.

Doña Luisa spurred them on by exclaiming that the *Indios* were falling to the ground, and the soldiers already to one knee. . . .

San Rafael Arcangel was not intended as a true mission; it was to be a place for healing the sick, although there would be a chapel, baptistry and cemetery. The first mission north of the great bay, it marked, in 1817, the northernmost advance of the cross, and tapped the richest district founded by the Franciscans. At the base of a semicircle of hills, bounded only by the bay at the east, and with sheltering mountains southward, the hills and valleys swarmed with Indians, to whom the padres intended to minister.

Te Deum was in the air before the little party were themselves off their horses and on their knees. The holy cross, painted white, had been set upright, and beside it Fra Sarria chanted his office; his brothers, Luis, Narciso and Juan Amoros, announced the Word in three languages; the sonorous prayer rolled over the naked savages; rolled (it seemed) clear to the hills in the still air, and then, like a sea of sound, surged back gently in echo. At last even *Maria Santisima* fainted away.

Fra Sarria at the end came to the newcomers; before long he was asking don Estevan about his servants. "If you want to baptize any, take those three," don Estevan roared, indicating his favorites. "And why not name them for the archangels—Miguel, Rafael and Gabriel?" The conceit of it tickled del Valle, and his laughter, like a gale, swept through the gathering. Suddenly, in the very midst of it, he asked, "Who is that father standing beside the cross?"

"His name, in God, is Juan Amoros . . ."

"His name, before he became a Franciscan!"

The gaunt padre named Juan had turned away, and joined a group of rancheros.

"He has forgotten," Fra Sarria said. "And so have I."

The air, storm-pregnant, was very still; in some way soldiers, padres, rancheros, all turned and watched don Estevan. Del Valle's face was the color of old parchment as he walked steadily, almost painfully, toward the thin padre. The other's back was turned; he seemed looking out over the tule-marsh leading to the bay, over which an *estero* flowed sluggishly. Don Estevan coughed; the padre did not move. A little patter of rain began to fall.

Far up in the hills a Tah-mah hooted at his brothers who had fallen under the spell of the white men's god; a second, across the valley, took up the cadenced cry, and soon the place was harsh with sound. A soldier, in defiance, sprang to the newly-hung bells, and pulled at them. The peals obliterated every trace of savage chorus, and the near-by Indians fell to their knees.

It was at this moment that Fra Juan Amoros turned. The Franciscan was as tall as don Estevan, as broad of shoulder; his face, however, was carved thin, emaciated, the skin stretched painfully tight over the high cheek-bones; his entire frame was gaunt. His eyes, painted dark beneath by suffering, gleamed with an unearthly brightness, and that which made a portion of their shine was visible in the hollows of his cheeks.

The padre whispered, almost at once, "Estevan, Estevan, old friend . . ."

Not since his wife had died had Estevan del Valle been so moved. He had been prepared to discover that his instant belief—that the Franciscan was Juan Estrada y Cabrillo, dearest of all his friends of the past, and a sword-brother—was correct. He was prepared for bluster, since one never knew what a priest would do; he had been ready (with a touch of choking anger) to withstand any voiced protest that he himself mention nothing of the past to the other Franciscans, but such a pitiful plea as Estrada—now Fra Juan—offered, was unthinkable.

Given but an additional moment to think, and don Estevan would have roared with seeming confidence; as it was, instead of cheerful words, he did no more than stammer the padre's own woeful ones: "Old friend," he said. "Ah, Juan, Juan!"

Somehow, the hands of the two men, *ranchero* and padre, came together; handclasped they remained.

Fra Luis took up the work of baptism; in some tacit way the Franciscans did not disturb the two men.

Del Valle said once, wearily, "Hilaria . . . died. And the babe."

And Fra Juan, "I heard."

"I—was unable—to discuss the matter—with any one."

The Franciscan shivered: "Bloody, bloody, bloody . . . nor I, Estevan. And now . . . I serve God."

Don Estevan asked bluntly:

"Why?"

"There was nothing else to do."

"There are some who were honored for that night's deviltry, but all it brought me was flight . . . and you, Juan of the hot head and brave heart, to become a . . . "

Fra Juan's head dropped, and rain began to slide off his robe. His fingers worked at the fabric, and, as if the priestly garment, silk, marked with the sign of the order, had become an impossible masquerade, he stripped it from him, and stood in the dull brown of a working padre.

"I never thought to see you knotted by any girdle save of silk, nor your fingers crooked from lesser exercise than grasping a sword"—Fra Juan's fingers fell from his beads—"but, after what has already happened, I will never be surprised again. Juan"—very low—"have you ever heard of Andres?"

"He vanished."

"Ran!"

"Andres was always one to fight——"

"Or plot. I have thought and thought, and end at the beginning. A del Valle a turncoat . . . and yet . . . Andres never was one to explain his actions. You . . . a priest. Why, I ask again?"

Fra Juan said huskily, "I could find nothing else in which to believe."

While del Valle searched for retort, he discovered that while the padres were giving saintly names to the savages, the rancheros were more interested in Fra Juan and himself. The knowledge made him silent.

The rounded hills behind the site of San Rafael Arcangel were misty with rain, tule fog swept in from

the marshes, turning the twisted oaks to gray ghosts. The Tah-mahs came forward in throngs (they who had nightly prayed, unavailingly, for rain) for (to them) it was plain that the god of the white men had been able to accomplish what their own had failed in doing.

When del Valle realized that Fra Juan was to be given charge of the *asistencia*, he became grave and gay by turns. A friend . . . Juan himself, near at hand!

"Come to me, *niñita*," he commanded Hilarita. "Juan, this is the most undutiful daughter in California—will you give her a talking-to some of these days? Ask señora de la Torre; she will tell you how much this bad girl needs it . . . or . . . ask *don* Ricardo; he knows a thing or two about her.

"Juan, Juan, I will never see enough of you, even if you are in a Franciscan's robe. Ah, Juan, do you remember the time we were crawling through . . . Hilarita, dear one, there are times when I understand what makes you such a little terror!"

The rain began to beat steadily; the little stream which crossed the flat upon which San Rafael Arcangel was to be erected already flowed thick rain-water. Yellow leaves, hurried down from the hills, collected around the rocks and circled in the pools like up-curved blossoms of the winter. Water streamed from the faces and robes of the padres. The Californians at last sought the shelter of the trees.

What don Estevan saw soon made him smile. Hilarita, protected by the heavy robe of the gaunt padre,

was talking gravely to the man who had once been Juan Estrada y Cabrillo.

"Look out, look out, Ricardo," del Valle shouted; "these padres are the worst, and Fra Juan . . . well, it is lucky you do not know all there is to know about him."

Ricardo said earnestly, "Fra Juan is a good man——"

"Good? *Good?* That is a weak word, good. I tell you this, and I know: he is a saint!" Don Estevan, remembering the troubled sad eyes of the padre, believed this, now, himself.

VI

THE silver and orange flames of pine and driftwood from the beaches made the main room of the hacienda a place of cheerful shadows. Candles, barely dispelling the warm gloom, lighted the copper bowl on the polished table. The shutters were closed; voices shut out the sound of driving rain. Wind from the Pacific, whipping the tule fog to shreds, set the redwoods to creaking, sighed in the laurel. Darkness, wind, rain, made the room the more comfortable. The rancheros had changed their wet clothing; the padres' sodden robes dried out before the fire.

"Fifty years ago," Fra Luis said, "we would have been in some Indian hovel, shaking with fever." He touched his lips with a cup of hot wine. "A golden age, now."

"Not so golden where we go next," Fra Narcisco remarked. "Up the Sacramento and San Joaquin. War, the devil and disease are exterminating *los Indios* there. To boot, don Ramon fears that before it is safe to establish river missions, we must make certain that the river savages do not combine with the Yumas of the Colorado . . . well, first the candle and the sword, and then peace."

The rancheros agreed, don Estevan noisily, don José with twitterings, the English Wayne and Sanderson with silent nods. Before Fra Sarria could explain

further about the next venture of the Franciscans, Hilarita's high clear voice was heard in the kitchen above the furious rattling of pots; food was soon on the long table. The company pulled up benches, and Fra Sarria bent his head . . .

Fra Juan, eating little, sat beside his host. From time to time the old friends smiled at each other; once del Valle said, "I remember when you drank more than any two of us," when the padre merely moistened his lips with wine. Soon the *teniente*—Ricardo and Hilarita hanging on his words—was talking about a fight with the savages, and it was safe for don Estevan to say, "I can hardly believe you are to stay with us, Juan. When we came . . . oh, the land was fertile, the sky blue, but it was a wilderness, peopled with naked men. Now, when I think of the cattle and crops . . ."

"The good God has His ways of recompensing us."

"*You?*"

"Even me, Estevan. You may not believe it, but I am very happy."

The ranchero looked at the gaunt face, every hollow lighted by the blaze from the fire. "Are you?" he asked with the brutality of a friend.

Fra Juan met his eyes.

"I believe you are," don Estevan blurted.

Doña Luisa entreated the padres for gossip; it was said that señora Pico at Monterey had made a great scandal—was it true? And had the *Santa Venitia* arrived with a dozen families, not Mexican, but *gente de razón*? And did the ladies now have the custom of wearing their hair high even before marriage? And

how about the little romance started some years ago at San Diego . . . what? two children already? how time passed!

Nor were the men far behind; they wanted to hear how other rancheros progressed; Fra Sarria, alert man, was able to explain the saw-mill which had been installed at one of the missions, and how the savages were being taught to make adobe bricks, by means of molds, of uniform size; to tell them that tallow and *manteca* was being shipped at last to South America, which should bring the price up a bit. . . .

"You sell to the Russians at Bodega, to the north," Fra Sarria inquired. "Do you ever have any trouble with them?"

"We never see them," don José told him. "They send Indians down for the loads, and make immediate payment. Trouble? No."

"It is hard to understand why the king permits them to be at Bodega at all," Fra Luis said. "What strange religion they teach the savages can only be imagined by a man who knows little about it . . . but it is better than nothing."

"Better than worshiping crows and sea-otters and devils," Fra Sarria agreed. "I have an idea that once these Indians were better men than they are now. When we came across a burial-place which had been torn open by a storm, we found beautifully carved arrow- and spear-heads, and shell beads resembling nothing I have ever seen. We found cups, worked out of rock, and ornamented with carving. These Tahmahs have forgotten what their fathers knew . . ."

Ricardo slipped to his father's side and whispered in his ear.

"The boy tells me that the chiefs of the Tah-mahs still have carved arrow-heads and implements," don José said.

"He is part *Indio*, due to the way his father lets him run with them," doña Luisa complained. "He can talk their language, and——"

"So can I," Fra Sarria said, smiling; "at least, I know enough of the dialect to make myself understood . . . don Estevan, this is uninteresting to the children; did I hear you say that you have a servant who can make a little music for them?"

"Don José . . . h'm . . . doña Luisa has taught some of the servants at del Monte a tune or so . . . Will you call them, don José . . . doña Luisa?"

The long table was pushed back against the wall; the thick brilliantly-colored blankets from Mexico were taken from the adobe floor. Ricardo vanished into shadow. The *cholos* from *punte del Monte* picked a discordant note or two from their guitars, shuffled their feet, kept their eyes on the *padres* in distress and homage, and then, seemingly without direction or intent, swung into an old melody:

"Restless ever . . . drifting on,
Far as foot of man has gone;
On his cheek the salt that clings
To the Headland of the Kings,
Flung from the enchanted sea
Of Saint Francis Assisi . . . "*"

* From *Barbara* by David Starr Jordan.

Fra Juan had no notion of the words; it was a song, and a tune, he had never heard, but don Estevan, his eyes bright, cried, "Hilarita, dear one, sing the chorus for us. Do not protest, doña Luisa; I know what is proper as well as you do, and possibly better. This is no inn! The padres are not carousers, nor is the song anything to offend them in hearing, nor my daughter in singing. Sing, *niñita!*"

She had a confidence and bearing (Fra Narciso whispered to Fra Luis) which came only in a child of a caballero who had seen both Spain and California. "A lovely child," Fra Luis agreed.

Hilarita kept her eyes on don Estevan's; she smiled, nodded, and sang the lilting words simply:

"Little lady, cease your play
For a moment, if you may;
All I ask is, silently,
Turn your mother's eyes on me."

The fathers nodded approval; Fra Sarria's hand waved gently with the time, and, when he realized it, he thrust the offending member deep into his robe.

"A delightful voice," the officer said, bowing toward the girl. "Do you dance as wonderfully as you sing, señorita Hilarita?"

The girl said, "You shall see in a moment" . . . and Ricardo sought a deeper corner. To Fra Sarria she said, "Is it a sin to hate a person you do not know, my father?"

"It is a sin to hate." He looked at her with amusement. "Whom do you hate, child?" he asked.

She glanced briefly at don Estevan; it was as if she said to him, "Those who have caused you sorrow!"

Fra Sarria, seeing that the girl showed no desire to speak, continued calmly, "How can any one hate in this paradise?" He discovered then, with amazement, that don Estevan's face was grim, his hands clenched; Fra Sarria had come upon something which clearly was beyond him. Gossip the padre had heard. He tried to remember what it was, but could not. It came to him, pleasantly, that Fra Juan, an old friend in the world, was the very man to soften the ranchero's anger, rage, vengeance, whatever it might be that Hilarita's query had invoked. "Brother," he said to the sad-faced padre, "it is very important that you conduct San Rafael Arcangel, when it is erected, for the benefit of *los Indios*, soul and body, but . . . do not neglect . . . anything else. If . . . anything . . . gnaws at any one's heart"—Sarria believed he spoke in a riddle plain only to Fra Juan and del Valle—"remove the cause, brother, and make him happy again. Will you promise me this, brother?"

Sarria thought (he supposed after that he imagined it) his fellow Franciscan muttered, "Show me the man and release me from my vows, and I will promise it with the greatest pleasure!"

Fra Juan actually bowed his head; Sarria was satisfied with such assent. The padre heading the little party thought soberly, "I should get the worst of a bout with del Valle, but I had rather fight with him than with Fra Juan!"

"You should be crowned with a rose-garland," the

officer said prettily. "Señorita . . . if the men will play, will you dance with me?"

The tenseness relaxed; the *cholos* played a cadenced bar swiftly, and Hilarita stepped before the *teniente*. They danced soberly at first, and, soon, with more abandon. The fire flared; the candles turned the girl's dark hair to the color of a silver bowl in moonlight: don Estevan began to hum softly . . .

She danced with the officer: she was not so engrossed that she did not find a chance to smile at Ricardo, sitting in the shadow. She did no more than smile at him a fleeting instant, yet the boy's heart leaped . . . señor don Ricardo de la Torre was guarding the hacienda of Buena Esperanza from any possible hostile attack (he had the officer's discarded sword crosswise on his knees) from Indians, Russians or even the ferocious hordes of which he had only read, and who (before don Vasco Nunez de Balboa first glimpsed the Pacific, and before don Francisco, the Englishman, sailed into the long bay near punto de los Reyes) overran the European plains; don Ricardo had again become the protector, and all because a slip of a girl, even while dancing with an officer, had smiled at him.

In the hills the cattle collected under the trees—trees which swayed and jerked and bent before the gusty wind; the rain beat down the last brown grasses to the flatness of clay (grass which would, in a short week, already show the first spears of new tender green through their matted surface); the wind and the rain howled, and a cold dripping Tah-mah, far from his rancheria, howled to keep them company.

The wind and the rain and the miserable savage howled, but in the hacienda the fire danced no less eagerly than the feet of the guests; the candles slowly guttered out, to be replaced by fresh tapers. *Cholos* brought newly-warmed wine, spicy, aromatic, fuming with an enticing perfume (and drank the dregs of the old cups in the kitchen). The *padres* discussed the latest news from Spain and Mexico with the others; don Arturo attempted to show doña Luisa how one danced in England. . . . Ricardo and Hilarita, both very stiff and with bright cheeks, danced a modest measure. . . . Don Estevan, as softly as was possible for him, hummed the tune and buzzed down both the tinkle of the guitars and the sound of the elements. . . . Even Fra Juan's sorrowful face subtly changed expression.

He whispered to his friend, as if in surprise, "Estevan, Estevan, I can see that there is indeed happiness in the world."

"Have you ever doubted it?" the *ranchero* replied.

VII

IT HAD been impossible, during the months of alternate rain and sunshine, to dry adobe bricks and to commence the actual construction of San Rafael Arcangel. The padres had planned a composite building—church, storehouse and rooms for the ill from other missions; it was to be of thick adobe, some ninety feet long and forty wide, roofed with tiles and with corridors of woven tules. Although Fra Juan was not ready for them, several hundred ailing neophytes had already been sent him; he housed these mission Indians in hastily-erected huts of reeds plastered with mud. As soon as the *asistencia* had been built, Fra Juan knew that many hundreds more were coming.

Just what caused the sickness of the savages was not known, although Fra Juan believed that some disease had been brought southward by the servants of the Russians at Bodega, to spread swiftly among the many tribes.

The neophytes called Fra Juan the rain-father. Firstly, the Tah-mahs had told how the coming of the tall white man had brought rain, prayed for unsuccessfully for weeks; more to the point, the padre saw to it that the Indians (many for the first time in their lives) were washed until they believed their skins had become sodden.

"But he feeds you when he is done," they said, and, for the sake of the food, submitted to what they believed an insanity.

The missions, the rancheros' lands, flourished. At San Luis Rey, in the south, there were fifty thousand cattle, as many sheep, and several thousand horses. The other missions—San Miguel, San Juan Bautista, San Atonio, Santa Barbara, Santa Ines, all the rest—were not far behind. Money there was not, but money, gold, was not needed, and had no value. The padres at San Fernando made no investigation of the gold to be found in their own valley, being more interested in making their land fruitful.

The king was the owner of the land, although he was actually in possession of only the ground on which the presidio stood and of such adjoining lands as were needed in connection with the royal service. The laws of Spain rigidly protected the natives from all aggressions and encroachments upon their lands: the Laws of the Indies—*Recopilación de Leyes de las Indias*—commanded that the residences and lands which were granted the Spaniards should not be given so as to prejudice the Indians, and that any land unjustly seized should be returned to the rightful owners. The Franciscans stood as stewards and guardians of the land; the mission boundaries were held intact for the savages, protected by both padres and the law.

Plots were ceaselessly woven across the sea; new laws were placed into effect (and the rancheros thought nothing of them); taxes came into being (and the rancheros never heard of them); officials on both sides

of the ocean had their heads together . . . And the rancheros gathered their rich crops and watched the vines grow and the cattle increase; bothered neither with gossip, of which there was plenty, nor with fact, of which there was plenty also.

San Francisco Solano, north of San Rafael Arcangel, had been founded. The padres hoped to carry the Word of God and civilization farther into the northern wilderness. Slavery was being debated on the far side of the Great Mountains. The Missouri Compromises were being argued. The Monroe Doctrine (pointed against Russia) had been embodied by a message read to Congress . . . and the cause of it, Spain's loss of the provinces of Venezuela, of Chile, of de la Plata; the Mexican revolution, were all facts . . . but the rancheros did not hear of them.

"What time has a man to listen to such things?" don Estevan snorted to the padre of San Rafael Arcangel. "Besides, by the time we get news here, it is already too old to allow us to do anything about it. You worry too much, Juan . . ."

"Perhaps I have cause to worry."

"And why?"

"Who knows what may happen?"

Don Estevan backed him against the sunny wall of the mission. "Do you *know* anything?" he demanded. "We hear a thousand rumors, but none of them is half as important as the fact that the pear-trees at Buena Esperanza are going to bear at last, and the green fruit is thick on the branches and properly set and there has been no wind to knock it off . . . and

'Rita is learning from doña Luisa how to instruct the *cholas* in making a preserve of them, combined with flakes of ginger——'

"Once you were hot for politics, Estevan; for changing this and bettering that, now you go to the other extreme, and——"

"And have some sense at last. I paid for what I tried to do. None knows how sorely better than you, Juan. Now, the less I hear, and the less I know, the better it is for me. I am not interested in kingdoms nor in provinces. I am a *ranchero* and a Californian——"

"No longer a Spaniard?"

"All three. They are really one, I suppose. Listen, old friend—do you know, Juan, it is a relief when we are alone; I can not learn to call you 'father'!—I have spoken with other *caballeros*, and we have all decided that we have enough to do to watch our own affairs. This talk about Spain and about Mexico and about revolution is . . . talk. It will all simmer down. Let us wait a few years, and then see what actually happens." He smiled slyly at his friend. "Have you so little to do here that you are able to devote so many hours to thought about politics?"

Fra Juan was sole guardian of nearly a thousand sick neophytes. Unlike the other *padres*, he was almost always alone at San Rafael Arcangel; no fellow-Franciscan helped him in his labors. The Indians were housed in out-buildings, were nursed by mission-Indians trained by Fra Juan himself; many of the savages lived in the hills with the Tah-mahs, returning

to the mission only for food. The mission cattle had, like the animals of the ranchos, increased a hundred-fold, willy-nilly; Fra Juan, in addition, taught the savages, conducted his services . . . and, by night, was ready to drop with fatigue. Indefatigable, he delegated his overseeing to no one; he was everywhere at once; his gaunt frame became thinner, but his eyes no longer expressed nothing save sadness. Fra Juan had other troubles than the caring for the sick, the mission, and the savages; those very Tah-mahs whom he helped and taught and guided were willing, eager, to listen to every tale the sick neophytes related.

He said quietly, "If only we could make *los Indios* as splendid as the land! They were given an earthly paradise, but they do not take advantage of it, although we are trying to teach them . . . No; they do not take advantage of it, any more than most of them care to take advantage of the offer of paradise through the Church. . . . Sometimes, Estevan, it seems hopeless, and then again"—his eyes turned to the shining waters of the bay of San Pablo—"when I consider that a few short years ago these Indians knew nothing of the saints and the good God, perhaps it is not in vain."

"You have done wonders," don Estevan rumbled. "The only miracle you have not performed is making doña Luisa speechless . . . and that is too much to ask of any man. The woman sickens me sometimes, Juan! She squeaks about this and whines about that—do not tell me she has a kind heart! Do I listen to her heart or her words?—and if I were José or Ricardo I would go and live in the hills to escape it!"

"José is very well fastened down . . . but I am not so sure about the boy. Ah, well, he has another means of escape open to him!"

"And if you could see him watch that girl of mine—and she leads him a dance, Juan!—you would say that he will take it as soon as he dares . . . Well, the del Valles are gone from Spain, Juan, but we will become a great name in California! As soon as Hilarita is old enough to know, and Ricardo is a man . . . well, why not?"

"Do you think of Buena Esperanza, or of the happiness of the children?"

Don Estevan said slowly, "I suppose I think of both. And you, Juan?"

"I am learning that things do not always happen as we intend."

"And I am learning that you are like a rusty old crow—a croaker, Juan! I rode a long way to see you, and the best you can do is to say all the unpleasant things which come to your mind."

"Perhaps—well, perhaps I was thinking of my own problems as well as yours. I am worried a little about the Indians. Yesterday, when I was teaching the children, I gave them a few figs and dates when the lessons were over. One of the babes kept his sweetmeats . . . and a grown *Indio* took them away from him, and, when the child protested, stuck a half-inch of knife into him. I . . . I had difficulty in restraining myself."

Don Estevan nodded, but since he could rule by force, where the padre must only with gentleness, the

same problems could be solved in very different manner.

"Do you want *me* to come and do a little teaching?" he asked. "One at a time, five at a time, or twenty at a time, it would be all the same to me."

The padre sighed, but did not answer. There was still sun in the valley, but the hills, the eastward sky, had become a violet-gray, soft, illusive; earth and sky had the hue of unreality. The trees' outlines softened, and seemed clouds resting on the earth.

"Well, old friend," don Estevan said, "even Eden had its serpent. Tell me—what happened to Adam and to Eve I remember well enough—but what about the snake? Was it ever killed?"

"There are several opinions about it . . ."

"There is one snake I hope to meet again some day!"

Fra Juan nodded thoughtfully. He did not reprimand the ranchero; the possibility seemed too remote. Instead, he said, "It is not worth while to hate in this paradise, which is well enough without snakes of any kind . . . two-legged snakes, at all events. . . ."

He looked about at the busy mission, at the sick neophytes drowsing in the last of the sun, at the attendants who were bringing in cows to obtain milk for cheese; at last he smiled. "A few years ago and only the birds were here . . . a few years more, and . . . it is worth working for, worth working for."

What visions he saw don Estevan could guess.

VIII

A FEW years more . . .

Lazy smoke, vanishing almost at once into the clear blue of the early-morning sky; a dull buffet of sound throbbing in the sweet air as a Tah-mah woman pounded maize (singing of how ki-ki-ah, the jay, seeks his mate); the solemn distant lowing of cattle in the hills; the wild cry of an *apartador* hurrying horses from the grassy flats—early morning, a few years later, and el rancho Buena Esperanza was awaking.

The cries grew nearer, and dust began to rise from the beaten yellow clay. With the dust came the tinkle of a bell, swinging from the neck of the pinto leading the *caponera* of horses. Up to the shade of the hacienda itself the horses raced, the one herder stopping them just before the shaded door itself. The *yegua pinto*, her bell stirring the very dust with silvery sound, stood firmly before the door, while the other animals milled back and forth around her.

Miguel, *apartador* at the rancho, glared about him at the horses. From the waist up, like all his fellows, he was brown and naked; he wore soft deerskin trousers streaked fantastically with red and yellow ocher. His coiled hair—don Estevan had never been successful in making the Indians wear their hair as civilized men should, and had at last given over trying—shone

with thick grease, and through it, sign that Miguel was a man of strength, were thrust laurel sticks painted red and pointed sharply at both ends.

"Every other day you behave like the thousand fiends," he snarled at the animals in broken guttural Spanish; "but to-day, when señor don Estevan still sleeps you are as the angels of which Fra Juan speaks so beautifully."

A deep chuckle came from the black doorway: "And what makes you think I sleep, Miguel? Is that what my reputation is? An old man—good no longer for anything better than sleep?"

The Indian leaped from the horse he rode. He looked at the dust, wondered what to say, and was very sensibly silent.

"It was well done," don Estevan said, after he had let Miguel wonder sufficiently. "*Pero!* What a perfect day! Ever since San Rafael Arcangel was founded by the good fathers, and I took the three of you to see it and be made Christians, I have had nothing but trouble with you. But this morning! Rafael has my boots ready, Gabriel"—wiping his beard—"has at last learned to make my chocolate sweet and hot, and you bring horses as horses should be brought. My three archangels are at last a credit to their names and to me. . . . "Now, which horse shall I ride, Mig'lito?"

The ranchero had never asked his servant for advice before; it became to him praise unbelievable. His nostrils waved. His chest grew big, and don Estevan had difficulty in restraining a smile. He held his head as high as his few inches permitted.

"Kol-kol the raven, señor don Estevan? He is eager to-day, and his coat is like the bay water at night. Or Hah-ki-ah, who has been resting, and will run all day like the elk who is his brother in name, or——"

"What will Fra Juan say when I tell him that you call my animals after *Indio* gods and devils? He will give you more aves and paternosters to say than I will give you time to say them in . . . but I will not tell him, provided you behave yourself, and always bring me the horses so well. I will ride the horse you select, and how you choose him shall mark whether you care for the horses or sweep the kitchen for the women, the way Rafael did when he covered my boots with bear-grease." Half to himself he added, "It is too fine a day merely to roam the hills and then return for the morning meal. A man ought to have a little recreation. What is the use of being rich if one is still a slave? I will go and see if that new cook of José's is as fine as doña Luisa has been boasting. An hour in the saddle, and I will be hungrier than a bear . . . hungrier than an Indian!"

Don Estevan's figure had remained as erect as when he had first come to California to hold Fernando VII's grant; tall, broad, black of beard and black of hair, he did not look his fifty-odd years. He was dressed now entirely as a *ranchero*; no trace of Spain remained in his attire. He wore a short blue jacket with filigree buttons; his vest was of scarlet, worked with silver thread; short breeches, tasseled, and tied beneath the knees with silver cord, had beneath them and below them soft leggings of fine deerskin, colored and

stamped with arabesque ornamentation. On his head was a wide beaver-skin hat.

Ready to mount, after Miguel had fastened the last thong of the saddle, and held the stirrup, with a silver-worked *tapadera*, ready for his foot, he hesitated at the sound of a meek voice. He sensed instantly that it was overmeek.

"And a horse for your daughter, my father?"

Don Estevan began to rake at his beard; his mouth twitched, and he tried to keep it firm and forbidding.

"It is hardly proper——"

His half-hearted objection was taken from his mouth. "What is not proper, oh, great and famous don Estevan? *Me?*"

Del Valle closed his eyes rather than answer a question which, either way, would leave him committed. He felt, instantly, hands behind his head, drawing it down. Each eyelid received a soft kiss, hardly more than a breath. He kept the eyes resolutely closed as he muttered, "It is this, little daughter of my heart; I promised don José that I would ride over and examine some *orejanos* and see if they should be branded for Buena Esperanza or for some one else. Don José has agreed to have them waiting for me. It will be dusty work. It will be very dusty work. It——"

"Will be such very dusty work that you will need the good white wine after! You said nothing of this last night." She brushed her lips against his beard. "You are so important now, and so full of business, and such a great ranchero that you no longer have time for your Hilarita. Ah, well . . ."

The rogue was fishing for protestations, and got them. At the end, driven to it by sheer lack of invention, don Estevan blurted, "Doña Luisa is right when she insists that it is not proper for you to go visiting without a woman along. You are no longer a child, *niñita* . . . you . . . what is custom is custom!" the ranchero ended feebly.

The girl laughed softly. "I will promise not to steal doña Luisa's husband," she taunted.

Don Estevan, plagued beyond any measuring, hit back truly: "You could not, oh, wicked one; poor José has enough with one woman, and would be better off without any. So you promise not to do what you do not intend, eh? Well, will you promise also about that son of hers?" Seeing that his shot hit so aptly, he began to grin broadly. "You are a rosy goddess at this moment, 'Rita; you are the color of dawn, auroral——"

Hilarita stepped away from him, calmly, for all her flaming cheeks.

"And you"—judiciously—"were never made for a poet."

"No? Perhaps not, although I have written a love-poem or so in my younger days, and you need not laugh; I can prove it by Fra Juan. Well, if I am not a poet, I am a prophet, which is all the more reason why you do not go with me. . . . Oh, you need not kiss me again, shameless one, but what will doña Luisa think of you, and me? and, worse, what will she say? The woman is a fountain of words, and some day she will drown me."

"I do not marry the señora, do I?"

The bearded ranchero glared at her, and blinked a second time.

"It has got that far now, has it?" he asked soberly.

The girl mocked him: "You are the prophet, not I," she reminded him blithely. "I need tell you nothing—except that the horses are waiting, and in the sun, which tires them." Don Estevan turned, to discover that Miguel had saddled a horse for his daughter. "You will let your naughty girl go?"

He looked at her squarely.

Black eyes, both man and girl, black eyes shot with gold; she was, del Valle thought sadly, all her mother save the eyes. She faced him steadily, her pale cheeks touched with color high on the cheek-bones. . . . How she had grown; what beauty the sun of California had given her . . . a woman! The last fact dizzied del Valle.

"You are very lovely, very like my Hilaria," he said in a low voice.

She was all tears and kisses.

"Ricardo is nothing," she whispered in his ear. "I would never leave you for him—never!"

Don Estevan was no stranger to the business of love.

"So you doubtless told him," he agreed, again master of himself. "How many kisses did it take to make you change your mind? Well . . . *no es maleja* . . . the del Valles and the de la Torres . . . what a rancho it will make some day! I might have known there was something in the wind—you wear the new dress from Spain."

Very meekly, and with downcast and triumphant eyes, "I will have Ysabel place cloth over the *corazo*, and the dress which cost you so many hides will not be injured——" And left him to deliver the order, and (for lack of better) boast a little to her woman Ysabel.

There was not a thing don Estevan could find to complain about. The horses were ready. Every thong was tight and well tied. The silver trappings sent sparkles into his eyes. The leather *anqueras* covering the hindquarters fitted snugly, perfect half-moons of color. He wondered idly how much Miguel had understood. If the Indian had taken in too much, a little beating would prove to him who the *ranchero* and master really was—don Estevan, and not Hilarita; probably the sound of hoofs had kept the words, the beguiling and coaxing, from the *apartador*. Del Valle beat his servants seldom, a thing his neighbors—de Anzar, Gonzales, even Patricio Callanan, the Irishman, granted the land to make Santa Antonia—often chided him about. (The only Indian, they said, who made a satisfactory servant was the one who was beaten three times a week regularly, and twice upon any saint's day one could recall.)

He helped Hilarita mount when she reappeared, saw that her knee was secure against the saddle, and then roared for his hat. His great voice brought three *cholos* running from the house.

"My hat, my hat," he bellowed. "Am I never to have what I need? Is sunstroke what you intend for me? By the tears of the Virgin, I——"

The girl adjusted the thong under his chin.

"It is on your head, dear one," she said. "Ah, but it is a shame that you can not find something to be angry about. If——" She paused, her eyes to the east, and instantly changed what she intended to say to: "Some one is coming; perhaps you can find something wrong about him, and so spare your poor daughter——"

Del Valle clapped spurs to his horse.

"It is Fra Juan," he shouted over his shoulder as he tore across the clay.

He began to shout greetings before the priest was near enough to hear them; he roared that it had seemed years since the padre had been at Buena Esperanza and that he had been hurt by his absence; he chattered in Fra Juan's ear until they were again at the hacienda; began, then, to give a dozen orders at once—food for the padre, coffee for him, chocolate, a cup of the coolest wine——"

Fra Juan's coarse brown robe flapped disconsolately about the mission-mule's flanks, the three knots of the cord chastising animal instead of man. The years had changed him none; his black eyes gleamed above his narrow aquiline nose as indomitably as ever, he was no plumper, for all his face seemed more content.

"When you depart, it will be on a *horse*," don Estevan assured him loudly. "Are there no longer any decent beasts at the missions, that you ride like . . . like . . . well, like . . ."

"A poor priest," the gaunt padre finished placidly for him.

Del Valle smiled in his beard as the father touched Hilarita's bent head.

"There was a time, Juan, when you and I were both much younger, when, if you——"

"Chastity, sanctity and poverty"—fingering the three knots—"are all I dare remember now," the other retorted, smiling also. "Other matters, Estevan, are not worth recalling."

"No . . . of course not. But aside from the horses and the ladies, do you remember the time you drove your sword through a chair, trying to reach—who was it now you were fighting?—and what was the girl's name who——"

"Is this a something you told my mother?" Hilarita demanded.

Don Estevan gulped air.

"You see how it is with me," he said finally to the padre. "Words cut from my mouth. Ruled by a woman. She patterns herself after doña Luisa, I believe. She likes to have her fingers into everything . . . a true del Valle, I suppose . . . more like . . . Tell me, Juan, do you still pray for Andres?"

Forgetful of the presence of the girl, the padre said earnestly, "I pray for your brother every night of my life."

"He was never one for praying himself. With your prayers, perhaps his stay in purgatory was short——"

"If he is dead."

"If he is dead? He must be. How many years is it since I left Spain? Once, Juan, I may have hoped that he *was* dead, but now . . . the years make a difference, and I am not so sure. I . . . Miguel! Goat and son of a goat! Take the good father's mule and

feed it—to the crows if there are any about. Astride a mule—you! I remember the time we——”

Fra Juan said, “Hush, old friend.”

“Is it Andres del Valle of whom you speak?” Hilarita asked in a small voice.

Her father’s mouth dropped open.

“And what if it is?” he shouted. “What do you know of him? Whoever put that name in your mouth?”

The girl shrugged.

“Am I deaf?” she asked.

“Tell her,” the padre suggested.

Estevan del Valle wiped moisture not of the sun from his face. “It is too long a story,” he said at last. “It was a matter of politics, of which thing I am glad you do not know. And it is too hot, anyhow. And, besides, I will not tell you until I am ready to do so. I am not the man to be forced. I——”

“Yes, he will tell you when it is cooler,” Fra Juan said slyly, while Don Estevan puffed out his cheeks. “But you, my daughter, where do you go? You are dressed for a *valecito*, a little party? I did not know——”

A gale of laughter from the relieved ranchero greeted the words. “Now *you* can fence with her,” he said, when he could talk. “She is too ready with the tongue for me; she is quick, like her mother, where I only roar like a del Valle, but you always had a *way* with the——”

Fra Juan raised his hand in reproof: “That was long ago,” he said. Nevertheless, he smiled.

In the little silence a bird sang; as an afterbeat, as

soft, as sweet, as very low, there came the singing of the bells of the mission.

"Peace!" the padre whispered.

As he spoke, his fingers wandered (without his knowledge) to his robe. At first father and daughter thought he searched for his beads; as their eyes followed his hand—his lips were moving in prayer—they saw that he touched a jagged three-cornered tear in the rough fabric.

Fra Juan said again, "Peace!" and then saw what the others looked at. "It is nothing," he said evenly. "Some wandering Indian from a distant tribe shot at me as I was leaving San Rafael. The arrow passed through my robe, and even missed the mule. At times it is a good thing to be thin!" A far-away look crept into his eyes. "You recall, Estevan, what you and I expected the years to bring? Peace . . ."

"You should wear the leather jacket under your robe," the unhearing ranchero fumed. "You see, Hilarita, what these Franciscans suffer? Forced to face the savages with a little cross instead of with a gun; shot at, and not daring to shoot in reply; working like slaves and, probably, treated like them also by those they help——"

"The *Indios* grow more difficult to handle each year," the padre told them, "but time and patience will do everything. As to suffering, it is hardly that. We must expect interference, trouble, even a chance arrow, but if only we can prepare the way for those who follow, to arrange it so white men and savages will live in peace side by side . . . is that too much to hope

for? Those who follow in our footsteps will hold the land in glory."

Hilarita's black eyes lighted. "Footsteps," she said slowly, "and a foothold in the land. Conquerors' footsteps . . . and saints'."

"Only those of men."

Don Estevan snorted, "What is this talk of feet? Arrows are what should concern us! A padre shot at by a dirty two-legged goat of a tailless savage! Blood of the devil—if he has any, which I doubt—this is unheard of! I love you, Juan, even though I do not care to have you a martyr."

Fra Juan bowed his head, and his eyes became lustrous. "I am not good enough," he said simply. Since the ranchero waited for him to say more, he added, "We have no easy time at San Rafael. They have sent us *soldados* since I saw you last; they are a lazy breed; they have not been paid for months—there is something up of which I will tell you later—and they are surly. They give little, and want much. Their uniforms are turned to tatters; they will not bathe; they live like and with the Indians. And their uniforms, even in rags . . . are . . ."

"Are what?"

"You will see them in good time."

"Not I," don Estevan muttered. "What are soldiers to me?"

Fra Juan said, "As you will." He added, in a thick strange voice, "They have an officer . . . he may be something to you."

"I prefer the company of the caballeros."

"An officer—a young officer. Not a man of your age, Estevan. His name is . . . Cienega. If you are not interested in him, perhaps you might be interested in his . . . politics. You disagreed with his family once."

Don Estevan made a choking noise.

"If I were not a priest, I would agree with what you are thinking, old friend," the padre said. "But, after all, it is the son, and not the father. He has ridden south to-day to see Santiago de Anzar, after which——"

"Keep him away from Buena Esperanza," the ranchero grunted.

"Sooner or later you will be forced to see him. Ah, Estevan, do you remember the time we had Cienega—the father—tied so he could not move a muscle——"

"And what we did came neither under the head of poverty nor chastity nor——"

"I was not a priest then. But we did put the fear of the devil into his unholy head—the only kind of fear he understood. If we had known then how his satanic master planned to use him, we might have averted many things. Ah, well, it is over these many years . . . and forgotten in Spain."

Hilarita, listening without understanding, grew restless.

"A gallant officer will be appreciated by some," she said pointedly. "Here I stand, perhaps not pretty, but at least unmarried, and not a compliment paid me. A new dress clear from Spain, of the latest style and the newest material and fit to stand in before the Queen

herself, and yet neither of you can admire it—or me! Perhaps señor Cienega will have better eyesight . . . and the proper sort of words.”

“That is how she goes on,” del Valle protested. “She has no manners. Just because you do not say, ‘Ah, the lovely little dress, so bewitching, so entrancing,’ or ‘How did the señorita sleep during the past night?’ she interrupts men of affairs to——”

“Affairs!” Hilarita came as close to a mockery of don Estevan’s own snort as she dared (and close enough to cause Fra Juan to stifle a laugh). “Affairs? It is because I am bored—bored—bored in this land of savages, and when a visitor comes all I ever hear is talk of cattle and the price of *manteca* and the price of *sebo* and the condition of the grapes, but if I say, ‘What a herd we had at the last killing!’ you tell me to be silent because I am only a woman!”

Fra Juan answered before don Estevan: “We forget that this is different from Spain,” he agreed. “Which do you want, my daughter? Compliments? Suave words and pretty phrases? or . . . a hand in the affairs of the rancho?”

The girl bit her lip.

“Both,” she said blithely.

“It will come to that,” her father muttered. “Too much Luisa! A bad example! But hear me in this, little one: if you so much as wave a fan at this Cienega, I will lock you in your room.”

“You interest me, father.”

“Ygnacio Cienega is hardly—a good man,” the padre agreed gravely.

"*You* interest me also," the girl said, veiling her eyes.

Don Estevan glanced from padre to daughter, and then shouted, "Bah!" as he glared at the placidly demure girl.

The dust under foot began to grow alive and restless with heat. The shadows of the hacienda seemed cut out of blocks of ebony, and had crept past where all were standing.

"You see how she makes a fool of me," the ranchero protested. "She says one thing, thinks another, and probably means something different from either. I have talked so much, and said so little, that my throat is cracked. Come inside: we will have a cup of cold wine."

"You were going to ride—where?" the padre asked, holding back.

"Ask Hilarita!"

The gaunt Franciscan turned to her questioningly. He spoke gravely, although his eyes twinkled. "So that is the reason for the grand new dress? Well, let me think. No, it can not be Santiago de Anzar, for he already has one wife. It is assuredly not don Patricio Callanan, since he will have none—a strange state of affairs for an Irishman! And Juan Antonio Gonzales would beat any woman who would have him, not knowing any better; it is not Gonzales. But it comes to me that José de la Torre has a son . . ."

"That Ricardo?" del Valle cried, elated. "Him? She would not look at a man like Ricardo. She even told me so."

"You plague her too much—and so do I," the padre

smiled. "But if you ride to la punte del Monte, may I ride with you? Doña Luisa considers me a capable duenna, although I never know if that is to my credit or not. What I want to tell you, Estevan, I must tell de la Torre also."

"And what is that?"

"It will keep. There is no hurry."

"I do not like secrets. Is it—does it concern what we spoke of when I was in San Rafael last?"

At the padre's nod of assent del Valle's brows drew together.

"Mexico will never dare——"

"They dare more than you dream," Fra Juan said unwillingly. "These soldiers are not leather-jackets of the King—the first glance would tell you that much! They come from Mexico . . . and not under the banner of Spain." He raised his hand for silence. "Let the matter wait, my son."

The ranchero knew from the formal ending that his friend would say nothing more. He bellowed an order; mysteriously a saddled horse was brought for the padre, although none seemed, an instant before, to have been ready.

Fra Juan tightened the cord of his habit.

"A horse to ride—an enemy to fight—a woman to love—all save the first is forbidden to me. If the horses are not too cool, I do not believe it would be a sin for me to race you to the first tree——"

Side by side, the padre silent, don Estevan shouting at the top of his lungs, the old friends pelted across the hard clay. Fra Juan's robe straightened from its

folds in the wind; he seemed a curious dark angel, a charging crusader without a sword, and, curiously also, very much a man.

Clear to the tree they sped, and past it; Hilarita, in their rear, followed demurely enough, for all her hot desire to pound after them. Hilarita—little joyous one, from her very name—knew and understood the urge which sent the men flying across the beaten earth; she felt it herself. She did not speed her own horse forward—a horse more fleet than either of the others, and who fought now for his head—not because she cared at all that it might be improper to tear after the two men; she realized that the two wanted a moment, alone, of forgetfulness.

IX

HILARITA DEL VALLE had seen five ranchos added to the district tributary to San Rafael Arcangel; only three had existed when she had first come to Buena Esperanza. At Saucelito (directly across the bay from the presidio) was the rancho of that name, owned by William Sanderson, an Englishman who had been a pilot and sea-captain. Bordering this, but to the east of the mountain of the Tah-mahs, was corte de madera del Presidio, from which wood for padres and soldiers in San Francisco Assisi was cut, owned by Arthur Wayne—don Arturo. Both men had married Spanish women, both considered themselves as Californians.

Rancho Santa Antonia, north and east of Buena Esperanza, and reaching as far as the marshes of San Pablo, belonged to the Irish don Patricio Callanan—once Patrick, who spoke a language strange to hear, being a mixture of Spanish, English and a dozen Indian dialects. When drunk (which was not seldom, to Fra Juan's distress) Callanan could and did add a smattering of Greek and a deal of fluent Latin. Ranchos de las Baulinas, San Rafael Arcangel and las pulgas del Diablo (the fleas of the devil always present and hungry, as guests always discovered) had been newly settled; their adobe haciendas were white and glaring in the sun.

Of all the ranchos, Buena Esperanza was the richest. Perhaps ten thousand cattle ranged the hills. A tenth of the increase (estimated, for don Estevan did not know how many he actually owned) were driven each year to the mission, or, at Fra Juan's request, were turned into marketable hides and tallow. How many horses he owned he never knew. A man might ride a different one every hour of the day and every day of the week—and what was the use of any reckoning beyond that? Don Estevan was a great landholder. He might have purchased a town or two in Spain, and never missed the money.

The day was warm, as the three rode toward del Monte, but the sun was only uncomfortable when they rode along a ridge. One might see the curling surf of the Pacific, the broad bays to eastward and, behind them, the purple hills.

In the valleys (cattle under every broad tree) grasses grew; cresses made a darker green along the streams; flowers of ultramarine, yellow, purple; the mauve of iris and the scarlet of paint-brush, the brownish and mottled gold of mission-bell—leagues of land, all don Estevan's; thousands of cattle, all don Estevan's; many servants, don Estevan's also; fat elk in the hills and shining trout in the streams; berries and grapes on the vines and fruit on the trees, all don Estevan's . . . and, hidden now from the riders by the serrated ridges, a low white building with a bare white cell—Fra Juan's . . .

They rode silently, thinking of that very comparison, until the ranchero said, "I hear voices——"

"The *Indios*."

"You have good ears, Juan. The sound only came to me as a murmur——"

"A good nose!"

Hilarita wrinkled her own. She smelled smoke, but nothing else.

A sharp bend in the creek-bottom they were following showed that they had come upon a Tah-mah encampment. None of the Indians rushed out to meet them; all were watching the stream of smoke issuing from what appeared a huge pile of poles and branches.

"*Temescal!*" don Estevan cried. "I hope it takes the devil out of them. These Tah-mahs are no longer satisfied with elk—it is cattle, and the fattest ones they can steal—that they gorge upon."

Around the low hutlike structure a Tah-mah danced wildly, his arms aloft, his face fiendish and appalling. Daubs of yellow and white streaked his naked body. The others of the tribe paid no attention to him; they rocked back and forward on their haunches, eyes on the thick black column of smoke.

Faster and faster the naked savage whirled about the hut. He leaped high, fell to the earth, writhed in seeming convulsion, and then was on his feet again. Neither he nor the onlookers uttered any sound.

Smoke, in the quiet air, had settled down; as the Spaniards rode nearer it became a nauseous pall, enveloping them almost completely. A confused babble of sound came from the heap of branches—the voices of men and women.

"A half-hour in the sweat-house would train one for

the furnaces of hell," don Estevan whispered to the padre.

The ranchero knew what was happening inside the crude structure. The interior of the sweat-hut was shaped like an inverted bowl, and the fire, which belched the smoke through the one small vent in the covering branches, would be blazing like a caldron. Men and women, naked as they would some day be prepared for death, would be sitting around the fire; one after another they would take part in a slow shuffling dance, little more than a promenade around the central fire. One of their number would chant some monotonous song, every other word the signal for the light stamping of bare feet on the warm earth.

As the underground hut grew hotter, the pace would increase, and the song rise sharply, quickly; the savages would begin to prance and shout, their voices forced above the roar of the fire. One thing don Estevan remembered vividly, and he made an unconscious grimace as he thought of it: the stink of the overwhelming odor of dirty naked bodies, intensified in the thick heavy air of the hot chamber.

The uproar and discord would increase, until the Tah-mahs oozed sweat from every pore, until they seemed as if coated with unfragrant oil. Their faces would change from brown to rusty red, and, in the room lighted only by the redder fire, they would be scarlet ghosts in a scarlet orgy.

Soon the Indians would, one after another, fall from exhaustion; their breathing would be harsh and labored, their lungs fighting for a draft of air in the close

walled-in sweat-house. They would batter at the walls, hoping to discover some weak point which would give before their frantic tearing fingers, but the stout poles would resist every onslaught.

Some few of the stronger men would try to caper about the fire, but the reeking air would choke them to the earth, weak from perspiration, suffocated by gas and smoke, unable to do more than open and close their mouths.

The sweat-house also served for the burning of the dead when, amid the howls of the survivors, the body, arms and legs tightly bound to the trunk, was cremated on a funeral pile of wood, and the ashes, mixed with pitch, were daubed on the faces of the relatives. With the body was burned all of the belongings of the dead, while the chief would repeat the Tah-mah belief that even as the moon died and came to life again, so with man; that a good man traveled west to where the earth and sky meet and became a star; that a bad man, instantly, was changed to a grizzly . . .

The Tah-mah outside the sweat-house sprang wildly into the air, and then dropped flat on his face. Slowly, painfully, he crawled toward the sweating-place; when his fingers touched the wall the other Indians outside rushed to the hut and began to tear the branches away; since a dancing man in the air was exhausted, the Indians on the inside, they reasoned, had completed the treatment.

From the first hole made a Tah-mah staggered, his eyes glazed, his face as red as the interior fire; for a moment he stared about him, while his tortured lungs

drew in air, then, with a wild scream of exultation, he dashed toward the creek and plunged headlong into a pool of cold water. Like a train of demons the other Tah-mahs, men and women together, reeled after him, the men swaying, the women falling again and again.

Some lay seemingly lifeless in the stream; the stronger ones revived quickly, and left the water in an upright position; most of the women were only able to crawl to their huts, their pendulous breasts dragging in the dust.

A Tah-mah began to sing the end of the performance:

*"Ol-lusmuk-ki-e!
Choo-ta-tok-kew-lah!
To-tooo-kooo!"*

"What devil's song is that?" don Estevan asked, as they left the rancharia.

"Deviltry expresses it," the padre returned, shrugging his shoulders. "A song about the toad-woman and the witch-doctor and the chief of the underworld-people. Some day"—fiercely—"they will all follow the Faith, or there no longer will be any Indians!"

"It reminded me—that is, the dancer outside did—of don Santiago trying a fandango after several cups of wine."

"That is how she talks," don Estevan blustered. "Don Santiago, poor fellow, has his little faults, but he is a good man. All she thinks about is her Ricardo, and what she sees in him I can not understand."

Hilarita rode close to her father; she raised herself in the saddle and whispered in his ear.

"Well," don Estevan said, grinning widely, and pinching her cheek, "if you really believe he tries to pattern himself after me, it is another matter."

Fra Juan began to laugh softly.

"You are putty in the hands of a pretty woman," he said.

Hilarita gave the padre a flash of bright eyes.

"It is the first compliment of the day," she said gleefully.

"See to it that it is the last," don Estevan grunted. "Señora de la Torre knows what is what, and likes to talk about it. Will you have her think that I raise you like an inn-servant, *niñita*? What would she say and think—not that I care for the latter—if you speak to Ricardo, or Ricardo speaks to you, about such silly things as compliments——"

"That I was an apt pupil of Fra Juan and yourself!"

The padre laughed a second time; he was still chuckling as they topped the rise which showed, below, warm in the sunshine, the hacienda of the de la Torres.

X

FRA JUAN kept silent through the morning meal; he ate little, but don Estevan did valiant work with the beefsteak with rich gravy (in which olives, onions, herbs from the hills, peppers and a dozen other ingredients played subtle part), with the eggs boiled and fried, the *tortillas*, and the coffee made from parched peas; he was in rare good humor when he had sopped the last gravy from his plate.

"You, Hilarita, should eat more," he said expansively. "You are too thin."

The girl glanced cautiously across the table at Ricardo; seemed to find in his eyes the answer she expected.

"It is hard on a woman here," doña Luisa squeaked. "José wears out his *serapes grandes* by leaning against the wall in the cool spots, and Ricardo tears his riding through the chaparral—usually toward Buena Esperanza, although why he can not be satisfied to take the slower trail is something very strange to me"—but not to any of the others, nor, from her veiled eyes, to Hilarita—"and the *cholos* steal the *frazadas cameras*—they must sleep in blankets now, like Christians, if you please!—And there are a thousand things to do, and then you men complain that we are thin."

Don Estevan dared not raise his eyes to doña Luisa's gigantic figure. The years had added their inches to

her; the *ranchero* thought that she was like the red-wood trees, and that if she were cut open crosswise they would find a new ring of fat for every passing season. He shook with laughter, coughed, choked, and then wiped his eyes.

"I am afraid I am too hearty an eater," he said as mournfully as he could. "Food always affects me like this."

"You men can laugh all you want," she sniffled. "You sleep in the sun, you have your *cigarros*; the herds increase whether you see to them or not; you have more servants than you know what to do with . . . but all of the work is left to us, and it has worn me to the bone. What do you care about us?" She began to whimper. "It is hard enough to get you to take us to San Rafael, even for confession, if you have found a comfortable place in which to drowse and tell lies."

"I have nothing to confess," Hilarita said softly, not seeing the end of the statement.

Doña Luisa turned her keen eyes on the girl; she looked from her to Ricardo, and don Estevan began to laugh anew, uncontrolled. Hilarita was rosy red, and Ricardo flushed with sympathy. He cleared his throat, hoping to draw attention from the girl, and don Estevan became all attention.

"Well, Ricardo," he said pleasantly, as if he were very serious, "what have you to say about this?"

"What—what does one say?" the younger *de la Torre* asked vaguely.

He turned to Hilarita, but received no help from

her downcast eyes. He cleared his throat again, but was able to get no further.

Not quite as broad as don Estevan, he overtopped both his father and his mother a good six inches. His frame had not filled out, but his arms already bulged in the tight sleeves of his yellow jacket. Threads of black and gold were worked through it. He seemed in clothing like a wasp; there was, indeed, a certain rapier-like sting to the uneasy eyes. He knew that they plagued him, but did not know how to fight back.

For unmeasurable time Hilarita gave him her eyes; Fra Juan, beside the girl, thought she whispered, "Ninny!"

"I—you see, don Estevan . . . if it meets with your approval . . . with the approval of my father"—his mother sniffed, but he did not add her name—"I . . . that is . . . I . . . señorita Hilarita . . . Hilarita . . ."

"Plague them no more," Fra Juan said sharply. "Go outside, my children; we have business—other business, and little less important—to consider. Yours can wait? Good. If it would not, it would not be worth a single word. Perhaps"—smiling slightly—"you can persuade Hilarita to find the exact words and phrasing for your plea, my son."

Doña Luisa heaved herself painfully from the comfortable bench.

"I have not forgotten what is proper, even if Fra Juan has," she snapped, and followed the hurrying pair out of the room.

Up to this time don José, wise man, had spoken no

word. With doña Luisa gone, he stepped to the window. "They are running up the hill," he announced with complete satisfaction. "If that wife of mine can follow them, it will be a miracle. Well . . . she will take her anger out on me later."

"Beat her, José, beat her," don Estevan suggested. "Every man should beat his wife once, and I do not believe you have ever done it. Do you, Ju—Fra Juan?"

"Do I beat, or do I believe? Come: we have laughed enough. Don José, I have a matter to place before both you and don Estevan. Tell me—you both hold grants from the King himself?"

"I, yes, but not José," don Estevan said.

"No matter; don José's grant comes before . . . a change, although his case is not very serious. Nueva California, my sons, is no longer a part of Spain."

Don Estevan sprang to his feet. For all his talk of California, the padre's quiet statement moved him deeply. "From any other than you, Juan, I should say it was a lie, for all the gossip we have been hearing. But——"

"The cord has been cut. What it will mean for you—for the missions—none can know yet. This time to doubt the news is idiotic, although we can not tell as yet with whom we are to deal. I told you, Estevan, of the . . . well, the uniform I saw on the *teniente*, and it was Mexican and no longer Spanish. I tell you this, my sons; you must prepare to become Mexican subjects. About the land I can not advise you, or not so soon. But I fear there will be trouble."

Don José said wearily, "Will they take our ranches?" but del Valle shouted, "Let them try it!"

"There are details to the business; I learned what I could from Cienega——"

"That breed has never been lucky for me!"

"It seems there is talk—and Cienega was delighted to relay it—of the Mexican Government taking the land and the missions from the Franciscans. It must be talk. It is unthinkable—impossible—an act of the devil himself. Surely none would attempt it, after all we have done and are trying to do. If it were to happen, it would set the devil into dancing a fandango in hell for joy. But, if there is truth that California is now Mexico's, we may have half-breeds rushing in for the land and the cattle. They will not be satisfied to take the wilderness—not they; Eden to their hands will suit them better, being what they are! Estevan, I warn you now; become a Mexican subject if it is necessary. Do not shout at me, old friend; I give you and don José the advice of both priest and . . . friend."

Del Valle's face was grim, his lips were tight. His eyes never left the padre's, and splotches of color marked the outline of his cheek-bones.

"It may be no more than idle words," the padre continued hastily. "I felt that you should both know, since don José holds a very early grant, as he says, and yours, Estevan, comes directly from Fernando himself——"

"Mine is signed by a similar name," de la Torre said. "Fernando Rivera—not the King."

"The Mexicans like even the memory of Rivera's

name little . . . the padres did not approve of it, once, but they know better now! Well, when I hear more I will tell you."

"Cienega probably lied," don Estevan snarled. "A lying tribe, his. Like father like son. A sword in his belly would pour a little truth out of him, Juan, and I am the man to do it with the greatest pleasure."

"You could. But you must not. He is a Mexican officer——"

"Ah . . . Mexican. How quick the breed turns coat, eh? Wherever the power is, there you can find a Cienega . . . We know, eh?" Don Estevan added dully, "He may have spoken the truth; there is always that chance. He may have, since he knew it would be unpleasant for you to hear! How did you keep from letting a little of his pig's blood, Juan? Bah! Well, José, what have you to say about it—or do you wait for your wife's opinion?"

Don José ducked his head.

"I hear a servant calling me," he said, and left the room hastily.

Del Valle was glad to have something to shout about. How moved he was only Fra Juan realized. "Even the *cholos* now give José orders, and he obeys them!" He paused, listening to an Indian's excited words. "Saints of paradise, what does the fellow mean by that?" he ejaculated.

"We can always go and see," the padre returned, rising.

The Tah-mah servant, at the doorway of del Monte, was trying as best he could to point two ways at once.

To the southward, readily seen, there approached a man on horse, galloping; foam sprang from the animal's fretted muzzle, and his dark coat gleamed with sweat. Northward, along a narrow trail, they were able to make out a figure which swayed as it walked; once it dropped to earth, crawled, only to lift itself by a sturdy manzanita beside the path.

"Doña Luisa may have the excitement she desires," del Valle muttered.

The swaying figure—they could see now that it was half naked—was much nearer than the mounted man. Padre and rancheros watched in both directions, apparently rooted to the clay. De la Torre's expression was merely curious, del Valle's amazed; sadness filled the eyes of the brown-robed Franciscan. What staggered so slowly toward them, he knew, was the shreds that remained of a man. Some force, stronger than mind, body or even faith, held him motionless; he wanted to speed to the assistance of the stranger, and yet could not. Nor was he able to pray; a curious deadness seemed to have crept through him, turning him at once hot and cold. In del Valle's ear he whispered, "What does it mean, Estevan?" and then, "Keep cool, cool, old friend; the horseman is Ygnacio Cienega, all authority and gold lace . . . but the other, the other, who is he, and why?"

Slowly, painfully, the man on foot—or on his knees—worked his way toward the shade of the hacienda, the whiteness of the adobe probably a mark for his eyes. He came close, closer; he was almost able to touch the watchers (the *cholos* vanished behind the

house as he approached, not knowing what evil spirit might inhabit him) before he tried to lift his head. His lips moved; he dropped all at once, to the beaten earth. At the selfsame instant Cienega swept up with a grand flourish and leaped from his horse. His spurred heels grazed the head of the fallen man.

All gold lace and authority . . . and yet two fellow-caballeros and a padre were stooping to the ground over a mass of stink and rags! It was unheard of! He coughed; he looked around; he slapped his flat gold-braided green hat against his thigh; he rattled his sabre, but all to no purpose.

The gaunt padre had turned the stranger gently to his back, a hand under the lolling head; to don José the Franciscan said, "Water and *aguardiente* both, my son, and quickly!"

Potent brandy was poured down the cracked lips. Water laved the dark dry skin. At each tremor of the limp body Fra Juan redoubled his efforts. Del Valle, his head already awhirl with what the padre had told him about the coming change, with the necessity of keeping silent before a hated Cienega, hovered about like an anxious mothering hen.

The eyes of the unknown man opened. He muttered something in his short ragged beard, looked blankly, horribly, from the padre to don Estevan; with a flicker of intelligence his eyes rolled, closed.

Del Valle shouted, "Who are you? Where do you come from? Fires and furnaces of hell, this is a white man, and no Indian! Speak . . . tell us . . . who are you and what has happened to you . . ."

"He can not," Fra Juan said grimly.

The stranger, as if in agreement, moaned and twitched.

"He dies, and we will never learn what happened," don Estevan cried. "Shake him, Juan; we must learn who he is!"

Ygnacio Cienega, *teniente*, once of Spain and now of Mexico, had tired of his secondary part. He had dashed up to the hacienda with distinction—was this how Californians treated a man, mark you, of great authority? Was it? He would show them a thing or two, learned from the best of masters:

"Stand back, señores," he requested in a high voice. "Let me show you the way to make a man talk."

His boot was in the air as a white figure whirled before him.

Hilarita had returned with Ricardo while the others were intent upon the prone figure (doña Luisa puffing in their wake); the girl had seen Cienega's movement and guessed what was intended. She alone had flashed into action. Her hand came up swiftly, and slapped the officer, none too gently, across the face.

Don Ygnacia stood with one foot in the air, like a molting stork. It was no position for gallantries, and, while he swallowed angry words, he set the raised foot to earth unsteadily. Then, recovering at once, he bowed and reached for the hand which had slapped him.

"You misunderstand, señorita," he said, managing a smile. "It was only at these señores' request that I——"

He left the explained action unsaid.

Fra Juan looked up from the dust. The hands of don Estevan became fists. Ricardo de la Torre's breath whistled through his nose, and he crouched to spring.

"You lie, señor," Hilarita said softly. "You come from a lying breed."

She stepped back, having flung her challenge, between lover and father. Her whole body trembled as if torn by fever.

Fra Juan's head was bent, and his lips moved. He had given his warning; more he could not do. His hand was on the heart of the man lying across his lap. Every beat, he believed, was throbbing up into his own veins.

It was very silent. Somewhere in the hills *he-la-jah*, the mountain lion, cried like a tortured child, and the Tah-mahs of the rancho rubbed their third fingers together to keep away the devil—a wise thing, since the child-god of the padre might not be strong enough to keep the evil one away. The breaths of the angry men sounded like the running of the Pacific's surf.

Cienega kept his eyes on the girl's. Lovely eyes, *verdad*, when they should smile upon one! He did not look toward either of the older Californians. He was aware that the caballero jacketed in yellow—a most unfashionable color—was tensed to leap, and the fact amused him. His trade had been politics, and still was, the stock whereof had been the peons of a Mexican province, shifty, chattering, light-weight spawn. These Californians, he felt, were little better. Pieces for his hand to move.

The smile on his face never wavered. He weighed carefully what he was to say (he was in most things a careful man); he fully realized that del Valle and de la Torre were powerful . . . *were* powerful. What he, as an officer of Mexico, might make of them, was a completely different matter. Cienega rolled the succulent thought of power on his tongue.

A wrong word, an incorrectly emphasized syllable, might make enemies of the two rancheros, and Cienega was not ready for enemies. A friend would trust him, but an opponent would be on the lookout. Interested as he was in dark eyes, he was not forgetful of plans equally as dark. He bowed with great gravity as he spoke; he might have been pleading a case to the King himself:

"Your pardon, señorita," he said very earnestly, as if his entire heart were in the apology. "And, señores, yours also. I but thought you had a runaway servant—and since I have had some experience in forcing men to talk, I supposed I might possibly have been of some little assistance. As to my family"—he smiled disarmingly at Hilarita—"it is well known . . . in Spain."

Don Estevan seemed about to strangle, but held his tongue. Ricardo, waiting a move or a word from the older men, relaxed none of his vigilance; Cienega watched him out of a corner of his eye.

The officer's suave flow of words lessened the tension. Fra Juan, glad of the easing of taut heartstrings, asked Ricardo pointedly whether it would be possible to place the exhausted stranger on a bed.

"Bed him in my house?" señora de la Torre cried. "Are you mad, father? Are my blue silk coverlets made for beggars? Is he to lie between my fine linen sheets? What a world this is! And"—in the identical shrewish voice—"are you to keep the poor fellow out here in the sun all morning? Cand'lario! V'cente! Manuel! Are there no servants to carry him inside? *Ay!* This is a mad-house!"

"*No sale de ahí,*" don Estevan muttered, smiling despite himself. "She is always playing the same tune."

If Cienega still felt the scornful lash of Hilarita's tongue, he kept his hurt well hidden. It was he (ahead of the grim Ricardo) who helped lift the stranger, who directed the pulling-down of doña Luisa's handsome bed covering, who made himself useful in a dozen ways. If his eyes—very accidentally—sought Hilarita's for praise, they were so pleading, so remorseful, so apologetic, that the girl wondered if this gaily-clad officer had actually tried to drive his boot into the unconscious man's body.

Even don Estevan was partly convinced. He whispered to Fra Juan that there seemed to be a heart in this Cienega's body; the padre, however, merely retorted "Is it so?" and was silent. Don Estevan, from this, realized that Fra Juan should know the *teniente* better than himself, and became grim and vigilant again, where he had been undecided.

Nor did Ricardo appear convinced; in his one opportunity he said to Hilarita, "I do not like him. He keeps his eyes on you like——"

"And is that so terrible? Have you ever thought that I may have taken you—or may decide to take you!—because there is no other in this land save married men and *Indios*? But let me tell you this, Ricardito; a handsome officer is not to be dismissed out of hand! I do not believe that he would ever lack words to ask for me when the time came!"

"No," de la Torre said. "He would never lack the words. But I . . . I . . . ah, Hilarita, you are so . . . so . . ."

Whatever he left unsaid seemed to satisfy them both completely.

When the stranger had been made as comfortable as possible, don Estevan, being useless in the business, fretted to return to Buena Esperanza. As excuse he gave the midday siesta, it being the first thing which came to his mind. The returning ride was anything save silent. Wherever the trail was broad enough, Cienega and Hilarita rode together, ahead, followed by the padre and don Estevan. The officer would have preferred the order reversed, but whenever he slowed his horse, Fra Juan, behind, kept don Estevan riding more slowly also; Cienega marked it, and decided not to forget.

Don Estevan talked of inconsequential things as long as he could, but finally said, "Even if that man dies, I shall never forget his eyes. They are to haunt me."

Fra Juan shrugged.

"He will not die," he said, "unless doña Luisa talks him to death."

"Where could he come from? A prisoner of the Russians?"

"You know that he was not. Had he merely walked south from Bodega, he might have been hungry, but never athirst. There are hundreds of streams . . . you must guess again, old friend. I agree with you that his eyes show something of what he has suffered. And, from those very eyes, from the shape of his hands, from that hooked beak of his, he is no servant——"

"I have always dreamed of Andres suffering——"

"That is never your brother," Fra Juan interrupted swiftly. "Andres had a broad face, a dapper appearance, a nose straight as——"

"I did not say it was Andres! Would I not know my own brother? And yet . . . how many years has it been since I saw him? Think on that, Juan!"

They rode a moment without speaking, don Estevan's head low to keep the sun from his eyes.

The padre said softly, "Listen to *el Cid*!"

"And they were running like fiends," the *teniente's* voice floated back, in the most correct cadence of the year. "At least a hundred of them, señorita. As they came up to me I asked them civilly enough, 'Where is the hacienda of señor don José Maria de la Torre, called la punte del Monte?' but the savages, if you will believe it, did not answer me! I waited a few seconds, and, when I found he had no intention of telling me what I desired to know, I seized the man by his hair—and I yearn for scented water to remove the awful odor and grease from my hands!—I seized

him and dragged him to my saddle. It was as I thought; he knew enough Spanish to tell me——”

Fra Juan muttered, “He must mean Quintin. He is the only *Indio* who speaks the language among these Tah-mahs here at del Monte——”

“And, after I had the necessary information, I slapped him with the flat of my blade to let him know how to address a caballero in the future. *Los Indios* are insolent. They need both instruction and attention, and I am the man to give it to them.”

Hilarita said soberly, “Perhaps you are in the right, Don Ygnacio. But these are not Indians who dig for insects. Quintin himself is a chief, second only to Marin himself. The man who refused to tell you must have been Quintin, and it is said that he is an evil man to cross——”

“Let him but try one little something,” Cienega said sulkily. “That is what I am here for.”

Fra Juan said again, “Is it so?” and with his low words the conversation ahead changed purpose, became indistinguishable.

As Cienega leaned closer to Hilarita, whispering, smiling, gesturing, Don Estevan said to the padre, “It is going to be difficult to forget whose son Cienega is. I wish that Ricardo had made a formal statement; it would end any foolish notion that daughter of mine may have in her head.”

“Poor Ricardo! He is a good boy, Estevan. He is . . . like the hornet. He does not buzz until he is angered and has cause for it—which is not bad advice for you to follow, eh? If—there is always an ‘if’—if

it becomes necessary to secure a new grant from Mexico, provided that already given you by Fernando himself is not honored, it will be well to have Cienega friendly. Apparently he does not know of the affair between his father and . . . the rest of us. Do not remind him of it. Consider that he is a fly, and spread the sugar for him."

Don Estevan laughed shortly.

"It is a strange part for me to play," he agreed. "I have never done it before." He was about to refuse, since he had no intention of using Hilarita as fly-bait; he chuckled instead. "Did you see how that spitfire of mine paddled his cheek? 'You come from a lying breed!' I believe that Hilarita knows more than she ever admits."

"Brains, courage and loyalty," the padre told his friend. "What a son she would have made you, Estevan!"

The ranchero stared out over the rolling hills, buttressed along the sides with green trees in every watered canyon. His eyes were somber, but in a moment they lighted.

"If I can not have a son, at least there will be grandchildren," he stated with satisfaction. "When the first grandson is born, Juan, I will give you a candle as thick as your leg and as high as the roof of San Rafael Arcangel."

"You need not wait that long," Fra Juan suggested with great soberness. "Merely give me one with an inch for every sin you can remember, and it will overtop the peak of San Francisco Assisi . . ."

Hilarita turned, and asked what they were laughing about; since both tried instantly to become inordinately grave, she properly suspected the worst. Her own eyes were dancing; Cienega knew that it would not be long before he told her that his heart was bleeding at her feet. He felt vaguely sorry for the girl, who had, as any one with half an eye could see, no amusement save riding from rancho to rancho, no society save that silent young lump of de la Torre, who did not even know that the color of yellow was no longer worn by the *gente de razón*. Hilarita's own thoughts would possibly have unsettled his complacency.

XI

EVERY window of the hacienda was covered with thick hangings tightly drawn, but dust seemed to work its way through the very heavy fabric. It was most unfortunate that the wind should be from the west, this day of *matanza*. Not only dust from milling feet was searching out every crevice, but the cries of horsemen, the beat of hoofs, the bellow of cattle whipped into the rooms of the hacienda at Buena Esperanza.

Don Estevan had not intended to round his fattest steers into the *parada* west of the hacienda so soon. It was a full month before the *diezmo*—the tenth of the increase—should be paid the church, and yet the fact that Fra Juan needed the tithe (and badly, or the padre would have never even haltingly mentioned it) had set don Estevan into frantic and angry action. Between Fra Juan the Franciscan and the caballero that the padre had once been, don Estevan was never able to distinguish. His friend—a man of noble and wealthy family—needing money, or the value of money! A pretty state of affairs! Fra Juan only laughed about it; a sorry laugh—*reír como un bobo*, del Valle thought with rage.

The ranchero believed that the coming of Ygnacio Cienega had something, and more than a little, to do with the finances of the mission.

Cienega, now almost a month at San Rafael Arcangel, was a constant visitor at the rancho. Don Estevan did not flatter himself (for all Cienega's courtesy) that he was the cause.

When the grantee of Buena Esperanza asked Fra Juan about the *teniente*, the padre would only say, "He has his orders, and must obey them." What orders? Even when del Valle bellowed his loudest, the padre did not say.

Don Estevan watched, distractedly, as his *apartadores* lassoed the animals by the horns; he saw the cattle which had been so roped driven to the end of the corral and out of it, where another *apartador* lassoed it by one or both hind legs, and at the same moment jerked it from side to side until it thudded to the ground. Tied, in another instant, head and feet, the animal was knifed swiftly, and in less than twenty minutes it had been skinned, and the fat placed in the great caldrons . . . all swift, all almost automatic . . . uninteresting to don Estevan. In his mind's eye he was already sending the value of the *matanza* to the mission. Fra Juan had refused to take the *diesmo* until it was accurately figured; don Estevan had added a portion to what he considered the actual increase, and wondered if the padre would realize it. Animal after animal was captured, brought to the opening in the corral. . . . Don Estevan, with a word here and there, sat on his horse watching and speaking automatically. His three head *apartadores*—Rafael, Miguel and Gabriel—understood the work, and directed it as well as del Valle himself.

Things were certainly not pleasant for the gaunt Fra Juan of San Rafael. Don Estevan, directing the *matanza*, knew that such was the case.

Hilarita, in the close hot room of the hacienda, knew it also. If she had been allowed her way, she would have been at her father's side now. She had done it before, and would do it again, but the presence of the de la Torres, father and son, made don Estevan adamant. What would they think of a girl who rode around like an Indian, eh? And what would they think of him for allowing it? And—worse—what would doña Luisa say of it, after?

Hilarita was not sulking; she thrilled at the wild cries of the Indians, smiled once as she heard Ricardo's voice calling to his own men from del Monte, who assisted the *apartadores* of Buena Esperanza, in order to get the work done rapidly.

She no longer lacked compliments . . . don Ygnacio supplied them. She supposed that he would like to supply more; a finger on her arm, a hand accidentally brushing against her own, these things told the story. But after Cienega's extravagantly handsome phrases she found Ricardo's reticence doubly, trebly sweet and delicious. What her lover felt, she believed, was too deep, too far from the surface, to bubble out easily in words.

The girl knew no other life than the days on the rancho. Indeed, she could hardly remember Spain, nor the mother for whom she was named. Hilaria—the joyous one; Hilarita—little joyous one. Yet from a word dropped here, a phrase there, she had been able

to piece together a picture, into which, a sinister figure, Ygnacio Cienega's father was woven, and into which, tragically, was the pattern of the life of Andres del Valle, who would have been her uncle. Her father had left Spain hurriedly. Andres del Valle had been killed, or had disappeared. Her mother surely had died in sorrow . . . Fra Juan, a great gentleman, had become a poor Franciscan . . . don Estevan, driven from his home, had become a bitter man (although he was cheerful now) . . . It was a strange business. She wished at once that she knew either more or nothing.

Her father hated the Cienegas, yet he was strangely acquiescent to don Ygnacio's obvious courting. Why again? She knew that don Estevan liked Ricardo, and wanted her to marry him.

She twisted around in her chair, rubbed the toe of her shoe on the floor, gulped unpleasant hot dust . . . stood up abruptly.

"Am I of no use save to count sheets and spoons and pots of fat?" she thought. The idea was like a slap. Bareheaded, without even a shawl, she hurried out of the hacienda.

The *parada* and the corral were almost concealed in the clouds of yellow dust.

The cattle of the rancho were little better than wild animals, for all that they were earmarked and counted twice a year, unless the days were too warm, and the herders slept under the trees instead of riding the hills and valleys. In the corral were the fattest and sleekest of the herd—great red and black beasts, and

huge tawny ones, who seemed to have changed the coats their ancestors had worn in Spain for a color like the autumn hills in which they ranged.

Beside the *parada*, in the circular corral, the animals milled; Hilarita, before the hacienda, could hardly determine their shapes through the dust. She stood undecided. If she wanted a horse, she must get one for herself, and the men were using the best ones. If she rode away, even over the hills, don Estevan would be provoked; he would want her ready with cups of cool wine (herself looking as cool and as perfumed) for the rancheros.

Bah! Her lips curled in a little grimace. Any *chola* could give them the wine as well as she herself; all her part really was would be to stand smiling while the servants brought the tray of cool drinks . . . stand and look a lady . . . count pots of jam of the wild strawberry . . . and pots of fat . . . *ugh!* The pots of red berries in sugar she might have stood, but the thought of coagulated grease angered her anew. Pretty Hilarita! Lovely Hilarita! What had don Ygnacio said: "Little rose of California . . ." She said aloud, "Little fool!"

An inarticulate noise from the far end of the hacienda caused her to turn her eyes.

The stranger, the man who had staggered to the de la Torre rancho, had, at Fra Juan's suggestion, been brought to Buena Esperanza, that the padre might examine him and cure him without the additional ride to del Monte.

A little noise—that was all. Indeed, it was the

only sound the man could make. Don Silencio, del Valle called him for lack of any other name; the man had never spoken a word, and must be dumb. Hear he could and did, but speak, never.

Hilarita called to him, "The day is warm, don Silencio; can I bring you wine?"

The man smiled, clucked, and shook his head.

He was sitting in a chair brought from the house, watching the *matanza* with interest; he nodded pleasantly after a moment, as if to say that don Estevan knew what he was about, and that the business was proceeding just exactly as it should.

Fra Juan, don Estevan himself, had questioned the stranger, but to no purpose. Don Silencio merely smiled, nodded, or shook his head at inquiries; given a sheet of parchment and a brush, he seemed to be trying to tell them that he could not write, which was at least proof that he was no priest. Fra Juan seemed doubtful: don Silencio seemed the sort of man who should have been able to make himself clear on parchment.

"Let him stay here," don Estevan had decided finally. "If I feed a hundred *Indios* I certainly should not miss the little our friend will eat. The more I think of it, the surer I am that he would do the same for me. And, if he does nothing else, he can at least be a duenna for Hilarita. She assuredly needs one." He was vastly pleased with his little joke, although the padre said that he wished he knew more about the man.

"It is not what he might cost you," Fra Juan said.

"Who figures the value of anything in this glorious California . . . save the padres now, since they must. Do not question me about that, Estevan; it is something you can not change. There is a difference between the hearts of the Californians and the hearts of politicians of Mexico and of Spain. . . . Well, if you want him as a guard for Hilarita, I will not object. There is something to the man that makes me think he is . . . a man."

Don Silencio, sitting before the hacienda now, was dressed in clothes of don Estevan, which he filled out but poorly. His eyes, very shining, gleamed over his great beak of a nose. He was probably of an age with don Estevan and the padre, but seemed much older. Only his eyes were undaunted. There was a semblance of oldness about him. His face was drawn, pinched; his shoulders sagged; he might have been a house crumbling upon itself; he might have been an eagle, caged, and tired to death with fighting against the bars.

His days he spent in the sun, as if he would never get enough of it. What he thought of the long still days, the peaceful nights; of the wealth and the abundance; of the timbered hills and the bare, the grassy valleys and the feeding cattle, he could not say. And yet he apparently knew a great deal: the difference, for example, between aged sherry brought from Seville in don Estevan's chests many years ago, and the new vintage an untrained *cholo* decanted by mistake (so don Estevan explained) over which the silent man wrinkled his nose.

Fra Sebastian, sent up from San Antonio de Padua

to be cured of his racking cough and fever, had taught don Estevan's Indians how to select different varieties of grapes, and what to do with them: the Buena Esperanza wines were becoming better every year. The few fogs from the ocean seemed to give the grapes a cool lusciousness which Fra Sebastian learned how to draw out; the hot afternoons brought a bloom to them which perfumed the resultant wine with the scent of grape and redwood and sun and blossoms.

Don Silencio smiled, and Hilarita did likewise. Glancing past him, she saw that several extra horses, already saddled, stood in the sun ready for the Indian helpers. She bit her lip, aware that the wordless man, while appearing to watch the *matanza*, was really watching her. The saddles, she knew, were not proper for a woman: she should not take one of the horses, and she should not ride away into some cool canyon . . . but sheets! beds! jars of . . . fat!

The cries from the *parada*, the bellowing of the frightened animals, seemed even louder as she started for the ready horses. She was midway to them before she heard the fierce pounding of near hoofs and felt the ground grow tremulous beneath her feet.

Some one cried, "*Hilarita!*"

In the split second while she stood undecided, she knew unerringly what must have happened: an obstinate fierce bull had, somehow, eluded the lasso, escaped the corral, and . . .

In the same fraction of time she saw the rushing animal emerge from the thick clouds of yellow dust. Wide of horn, a spume of slobbering foam flying from

his extended nostrils, the bull was tearing toward her. He seemed enormous . . . no, there was a second animal behind him, concealed by dust . . .

What happened next she hardly understood.

There was no time for running, even had she tried escape. The angered beast would follow a flying figure, although it was not this which kept her feet to the ground. She had seen, years ago, what happened when a bull's horns reached one's body. . . . Ah, Lady of Solitude, if she could only close her eyes!

She thought of nothing, could do nothing. It came to her horribly that she did not want to die, and yet she was able to do nothing—could not even pray, although the bright figure of the pleading Virgin indeed swept before her eyes . . . Or it might have been the sun in the yellow dust . . .

A man? A man, running near her?

Somehow, don Silencio had rushed from the hacienda—he must have seen the onrushing brute before she had—there was don Silencio, in the path of the maddened bull, gesticulating, making terrible throaty noises, harsh, guttural. If only she could close her eyes, find darkness, be suddenly back, a-drowse, in the hot room of the house, and find that she was waking from fitful sleep, and that it was all a dream inspired by the evil one; a dream, to be forgotten.

No dream: the picture of the man in her father's clothing, the white hacienda behind him, even a squat brown jar of *yerba buena* tended by Antonia, all became vividly awful, final, the last sight of anything to be seen on this earth.

Don Silencio was not trying to avoid the bull. This Hilarita knew instinctively. He was running straight ahead, between the infuriated animal and herself. She tried to cry to him, but horror and dust drove the words down her throat. Some *chola*, at a window of the hacienda, screamed; a long drawn out wail of intermingled agony and fear, as if she herself stood in the path of the horned brute.

Flashingly, Hilarita saw the silent man's face. It was deathly pale, and grim with an intangible something transcending courage; if fear had blanched it, the terror was all for Hilarita.

Her ears told her, automatically also, that Ricardo, very near now, was crying her name. . . .

The giant bull thundered past, followed instantly by the horse furiously spurred ahead by de la Torre. A wide horn pricked at her sleeve; if don Silencio had not caused the beast to veer slightly, she would have been impaled, crushed, a heap of white cloth and ripped lace on the yellow clay.

Ricardo's horse, at this exact moment, increased its pace, knowing this old and delightful game well. A hundred times de la Torre had practised this trick; the horse needed neither word nor pressure of the legs. As the man leaned forward and down from the saddle, grasping the tail of the bull, the horse leaped forward . . . the ground shōok as the horned beast thudded to it and rolled over and over, thrown by the dextrous jerk.

For a moment there was a confused muddle of animal and man, both concealed by clouds of dust.

Don Silencio, at the very end, had slipped and barely escaped the rolling body of the red bull. Before Ricardo could uncoil his *riata*, don Estevan and the *apartadores* had rushed up, and whirling ropes secured the fallen animal, trussing him tightly.

"*Ahora es todo un—*" don Estevan cried. "I have never seen anything like it in my life! Hilarita! Silencio! Are you both safe? The dust blinds me . . . I . . . I am upset. Ricardo, if you had not ridden like the fiends . . ."

They all talked at once.

That evil one, the red bull from the hills, had been properly roped, but the *riata* must have been weakly woven, and insufficient for his great and diabolical strength, eh? Or he was inhabited by *yu-wel*, the gray fox, and cunningly rubbed the rope against the side of the corral, to weaken the strands. A bad one, that bull, no? And how Don Ricardo—how all of them!—had dashed after the beast, to find that the señorita was directly in his path! And that don Silencio! who would have supposed an ancient could run so rapidly?

Women from the hacienda added to the confusion, with a dozen different stories of what they had seen. Had any one, Antonia demanded, seen the devil sitting between the bull's horns? No? Well, he had been there, but when she whispered an *ave*, or as much as she had time for, he vanished in a cloud of red dust . . .

In some way Ricardo had come to Hilarita's side; he stood with his arm about her as his father trotted up.

"When you all raced after the bull, I prayed," don

José said, so earnestly and apologetically that all laughed. His thin voice broke the tension further as he added, "Luisa refuses to let me ride a decent horse. I could not hope to reach the bull before the rest of you. I am proud of you, Ricardo! It is something to save the life of your beloved. . . . I probably felt the same way myself, when I was younger . . . although you need not tell your mother I said so. Well, we can thank the saints——"

"And Ricardo," Hilarita said unsteadily, drawing his arm closer.

The younger de la Torre was more moved than any of the others. Reaction had not set in. He still saw the rushing red beast and the slim white figure of Hilarita marking his deadly goal. He had almost lost her; he would not lose her a second time. A strange vision, half red bull and half glittering officer, made him articulate. He said, now, the last thing any one expected: "Don Estevan, with your approval I wish to marry your daughter." What he said was delivered in a taut cold voice, almost tremorless; once the words were out, he lowered his head an instant, and then raised it half-defiantly; he knew no defiance was necessary, he tried desperately to smile, to appear natural, but could not. Hilarita's hand, on his arm, tightened, and his body trembled with repressed desire to cover it with his own.

Don Estevan blinked, made a noise in his throat, started to say that even half-embraces were more proper after marriage than before, thought, as Ricardo had done, of Ygnacio Cienega and his many visits to the

rancho, thought also of Fra Juan's reiterated injunction that Hilarita remain as friendly as possible with the *teniente*, thought of Buena Esperanza, of Hilarita, and then said, "You seem to have earned her. See to it that you keep her. If it had not been for you . . . and for . . . Where is the man?"

Hilarita and Ricardo were the only ones who did not follow don Estevan's searching eyes. Neither said any word to the other: there was no need.

Don Silencio, his face washed clean of dust by the Indian *cholas*, his clothes brushed, had calmly returned to the hacienda, and was sitting propped against the wall again. The speechless man seemed interested only in a buzzard circling in the hills, and did not even look up when don Estevan shouted to him.

XII

THE mission of San Rafael Arcangel, in mid-afternoon, drowsed in shade. Only the white-painted crosses in the little cemetery, where the neophytes and a dozen or more soldiers were buried, gleamed as they faced the sun. The mission had been rapidly built under Fra Juan's directions; the adobe was already browning in the sun. No bell-tower cut into the blue sky, nor did stately colonnades run along the front. The three bells, suspended between redwood posts, seemed the same as the day the Franciscans had first founded the mission; a little breeze moved the clappers softly against the metal. Water, running from a wooden trough, made sound as sweet as any fountain. Bees, in the pear-trees, droned monotonously.

Directly behind the low mission, the hill bearing the same name (the Indians believed that *yu-ten me-chach*, the most evil one, lived on it, and pounded the bones of the dead for his food) was still coated with green. White patches, like new snow dropped from a windless sky, showed where the madroña dropped odorous blossoms. A red and jagged line, like the slash of a knife, marked a Tah-mah trail made to the top of the hill, where the necessary donations were made to the devil who resided there. Even the padres (many of the Tah-mahs thought) were a little afraid of this devil; why,

otherwise, would they bury the dead at the foot of the hill? As offerings to him: there could be no other reason.

Neophytes, sprawled on the ground lazily, held the reins of a half-dozen horses; the owners' voices could clearly be heard even outside the mission.

Hilarita, once the excitement of the incident of the charging bull was over, had asked to ride to see the padre, a request which, in view of Ricardo's statement regarding marriage, was reasonable enough. Don Estevan was even in good humor about it, for when the girl rode away he observed that don Silencio had left his chair, selected the best remaining horse and ridden silently along the trail after her.

Don Silencio, the ranchero insisted, knew what he was about; it was plain the voiceless man understood that Hilarita needed watching. "She will give you a time of it, I can tell you," he told Ricardo.

De la Torre had flushed, and (what pleased don Estevan more) rose at once to Hilarita's defense. The ranchero waited until the younger man was in the very midst of argument, and then said surprisingly, "She is all of that, Ricardo, all of that, and none knows it better than I," and clapped him about the shoulders.

Twice, on the ride to the mission over the hills, Hilarita had intended telling don Silencio to return to Buena Esperanza; that she wanted and needed no guardian, and did not propose to have any. That the speechless man had saved her life kept her silent, perhaps, but something else, something she did not understand, also prevented her from giving him the order.

What this last was she did not know. The man vaguely disturbed her. Not unpleasantly.

She reached the mission, and, at the sight of the saddled horses, paused. The loud voices made her hesitate again when she was within earshot.

"You do not understand," she heard Cienega say angrily. "Fra Juan, like a priest always does, has confused the issue. He talks like the priest he is, and therefore says nothing. The Mexican Government has nothing against you *rancheros*—no quarrel with any of you. You are here on the *ranchos*: very well, work them as best you can, and make them fruitful. But every padre must take the oath of allegiance to Mexico, or leave his mission and leave California."

Fra Juan's voice, sadly: "I can not leave the mission and my sick alone, don Ygnacio, to be gone for days when I take the oath. I have no political opinions. But I dare not—I can not—I will not leave my charge. Is there anything confusing in that?"

"You tell me one thing, but I wager you tell these *caballeros* a very different story when I am not here. I have an order to deliver fifty-eight *arrobas* of *manteca* to the presidio, and you do not have it ready for me. The mission has thousands of cattle—kill me a few hundred, and have the tallow ready. As to the oath, it must be given. I——"

The padre's voice came to Hilarita very quietly: "No one knows better than you, don Ygnacio, that the Indians are tired of being hungry, of receiving no clothing. They will not obey me. Marin, their highest chief, and Quintin, who ranks next to him, are openly

defiant, and try to keep the friendly *Indios* away from the mission——”

“Harping on that again, eh? Caballeros, merely because I once taught this Quintin, this naked man Fra Juan calls a chief, a little lesson, the padre reminds me of it a dozen times a day. I am sick to death of it. I am sick also of so much argument. I——”

A voice almost as loud as don Estevan’s rumbled: “I will send the *manteca* to the mission myself, to-morrow. Are we shopkeepers to haggle about this?” Hilarita recognized don Patricio’s growl. “What I want understood is this—who owns *my* rancho—*my* Santa Antonia. Answer that, don Ygnacio . . . and do not confuse the issue!”

“Your grant comes from——”

“I am not interested in whom it comes from! Who owns it now?”

“What would you say if I told you that the land—all land—is at the disposal of the authorities in Mexico, or the Mexican officials now at Monterey?”

Don Patricio’s answer came at once: “I would tell them, and you also, to come and take it!” A short ugly laugh. “To come and try to take it,” the Irishman added.

Hilarita heard the padre interrupt the angry man with, “Hush, don Patricio!” And, hastily: “Send the tallow to me, good friend, and then don Ygnacio can forward it to the presidio, and every one, due to your kindness, will be satisfied.”

“Not at all!” Cienega again, his voice high and shrill. “The order says ‘mission tallow’ and ‘mission grain.’

Don Patricio does not need to pay you the *diezmo* yet, and perhaps he will never need pay it again. As to the Indians, father, I have authority to beat them as they should be beaten. If they are unruly, they are your charges, really, and it is your fault, but I——”

Some fist pounded against a table-top.

“You dare to interrupt me?” don Ygnacio screamed. “You dare——”

“More than you think,” Hilarita heard Juan Gonzales of las Baulinas rancho retort. “Is it possible, don Ygnacio, that you forget Fra Juan is a Franciscan, a servant—and a loved one—of the Church?”

“I forget nothing! I act by authority of——”

“And, you young mule, are there no more manners in the world?” don Juan snapped.

“You call me a mule?”

Don Patricio: “Bray less, if you are not one!”

And then Fra Juan’s steady tones: “Hush, hush, my children. We are all excited. Don Ygnacio, don Juan, silence!”

His grave voice, stern now, brought quiet—so intense that the drip of water came to Hilarita’s ears like the sound of a bell.

“We may as well have one thing clear,” the officer said at last, fighting to control his words, and, better than any of the others could have done, succeeding. “Why can not you all be sensible about this—as don Estevan is.” This was news to the listening girl. “Spain no longer controls California. This is Mexican territory. A little word from me, my friends, may mean more than you imagine. Fra Juan, I say, must

take the oath. He says he will do it when he can . . . well, I am a reasonable man; I believe him. The rest of you must understand that you hold land which is the soil of Mexico, and . . . there are many men newly arrived in California who would gladly take it, since the haciendas are built and the vineyards planted and the orchards bearing. With the exception of don Estevan, and don Santiago here—who, nevertheless, has said nothing now in my defense—you have not treated me kindly. I will go—for the time being—where I will be better treated”—his voice came more clearly, and Hilarita saw that he had stepped out of the room, although he still faced it—“and leave you to come to your senses.”

As a parting thrust, he gave them, “Have the *manteca* ready for me in the morning.”

Don Patricio sent after him: “Go with either God or the devil!”

Hilarita had the wisdom to urge her horse slowly forward, as if she were just arriving.

Don Ygnacio’s bow took his head nearly to the earth. “I was just about to visit Buena Esperanza,” he said, his hand still to his hip.

The girl let him help her from the horse. Behind her, don Silencio sat stiffly. At a noise in the speechless man’s throat Cienega let go of the girl’s hand.

“Your duenna, eh, señorita? Would you be very angry if I told you . . . that you may not need a duenna . . . very soon? Would it anger you?”

Hilarita only said, “I must see Fra Juan, and then return before it grows dark, don Ygnacio——”

"Good! Excellent! I will ride with you. Shall I send your servant home?"

Hilarita smiled, said nothing, and hurried to the mission.

"Go back to the rancho!" Cienega commanded.

Don Silencio sat stiffly as ever.

"At once!"

The silent man favored don Ygnacio with a thin and acid smile. The officer was not certain, but he thought the older man winked. Cienega reached into his wallet, and drew out a silver coin.

"Now go," he said.

Don Silencio took the coin, since it was shoved directly under his nose. He smiled again, looked at the coin as if he had never seen one before, and then sent it spinning into the grass. After that, he resumed his observation of nothing at all in the hills.

Cienega stared at him, his lips working together. He seemed about to speak, but, instead, laughed shortly, and strode toward the one-story, tile-roofed building where he and his men lived. An idiot, that Silencio! Deaf probably, as well as dumb and idiotic. Cienega walked rapidly: he had been saving his green-and-orange uniform, the one embroidered with scarlet thread, for just such a time and opportunity as this—when a beautiful girl would (out of gratitude and love) fall swooningly upon his breast.

In the general room of San Rafael Arcangel, the men had not spoken again; Hilarita walked in during the lull. The rancheros came to their feet at once. Don Patricio, with a warning glance to the others,

brushed a place for her on the bench. His red beard bristled with pleasure. With the Irishman and the padre were don Santiago and don Juan.

Through an open doorway Hilarita could see the altar, and the holy-water vessels in their niches on the wall; she involuntarily bowed her head as she saw the wooden figure in a bright scarlet cloak, after the soldiers of Rome had mockingly dressed the inspirer of San Francisco in the red robe after the scourging. She could see also, past the figure of San Rafael (a curved symbolic fish writhing at his feet; his hands clenched and half raised above his vestments of gold and green) the little garden of the mission, in which vines and myrtle and roses grew in profusion. Near the open door was a carved stone, and she formed the words on it with her lips: *Aquí yacen los restos del Capitan Don Domingo Luis de Miranda. Nació en San Francisco el 18 de Junio, 1774, y murió en el mismo lugar el 24 de Marzo, 1822 . . .* The poor don Domingo, so sad; how glad he had been for the peace of San Rafael before he died!

The rancheros had apparently appointed don Patrio as spokesman: he went to work at once. "Señorita, I have not seen you for several days, but in each of them you have become more beautiful. I am even tempted to break my vow never to marry. It was a vow made in haste, and such can not be considered binding, can they? I believe I will call on don Estevan to-day . . . or to-morrow at latest . . . and make my announcement."

Hilarita gave him a flash of black eyes.

"Perhaps it might be well to find how I feel about it, don Patricio."

They all broke into laughter, although Fra Juan's was sad.

"You mean that you will look with favor on it?" don Juan asked, winking so broadly that all saw it.

"I merely try to save him trouble," Hilarita retorted.

Don Santiago thought, "If I had a woman like that—a girl with spirit—I would be perfectly satisfied. But I suppose it would be too much to expect, even in this garden of Eden. . . ."

"Let me plead my case a moment," the Irishman said earnestly.

"You could convince the stones," Hilarita told him calmly. "It will be better for me not to listen, don Patricio."

"She wavers, she wavers," the teasing Celt cried.

Fra Juan had little heart for the jesting. "You want to see me, my daughter?" he asked. "Yes? Señores, if you will excuse me now——"

"Urge her to accept me," don Patricio laughed. "I am a fine figure of a man, and how I have kept out of her clutches this long it is hard to tell, eh? Plead with her, father. *Asi! un jubileo y venga guita!* We will have a high old time and plenty of cash as well! She could do much worse. . . ."

"If I were only not married——" de Anzar mourned.

Don Juan said gleefully, "I will tell that to your wife!"

"None of you wear such nice uniforms as don

Ygnacio," the girl said, watching the effects of the words curiously.

The Irishman swore in a strange language and stared at her. Before he could break into words, Fra Juan said, "Come with me, my daughter——"

When they were in the padre's tiny room, adjoining his cell, Fra Juan said, "You should not provoke the caballeros, Hilarita *mia*. If you only knew what——"

"I heard," she said sharply. "Am I the honey for the fly?"

Fra Juan hesitated before answering. He stirred uneasily as he heard the whimper of a sick neophyte, sat down on the bench, and stood up again.

"No!" he said explosively. "A thousand times a thousand noes. But I advised Estevan to have his grant from Fernando of Spain reauthorized, before Cienega can make any complaints or suggestions. I advised the other rancheros also, but they did not see the need of it in their cases, and perhaps they are right. A letter has already been forwarded to the authorities at Monterey, and when the new grant arrives, little one, you may do as you like, and I can guess what that will be. In the meantime, give don Ygnacio a smile or two——"

Hilarita did not repeat her statement concerning honey and the fly, although she had it again in mind. She said instead, "He will not be satisfied with so little as a smile, my father. Not for long."

"No . . . he would not be. These Cienegas——"

"Tell me about them." She settled back on the bench, as if the explanation was certain to follow.

Fra Juan shook his head. He could hear the jingle of equipment as the three *rancheros* mounted and rode away; it gave him, as it always did, a feeling of loneliness, of isolation, of dependence upon things which, most of his life, he had not relied upon.

"Tell you?" He grew thoughtful. "I suppose you should know. The details are unimportant. The *del Valles*, and certain other families, were on one side of what was a political affair. The *Cienegas* were on the other. It should have been a fair fight, but it was not. Who was unfair I leave you to guess." His eyes began to blaze. "Is it hard to guess? How does *Cienega* act here? He gives orders contrary to mine. He cuts the words from my mouth. He steals grain and wine from our supply. He beats the neophytes for the joy of doing it. The *Indios* hate him, and, since we have taught them that all white men are brothers, they hate me also. I find it difficult to blame them. Once I would have . . . would have . . ."

"Yes, father?"

Fra Juan said in a tight voice, "Once I was a man! . . . Say nothing of this to your father; he dislikes *Cienega* enough as it is. What surprises me is that *Cienega* does not remember the name of *del Valle*. It is lucky that, being a fool, he forgets. It is fortunate that *Estevan* is no more than an ordinary *ranchero* to him . . . fortunate also that your father has a head on strong shoulders, and can protect the richest land in this region. . . . But you did not come to talk of such things, and I should not mention them. What troubles you, child?"

He had given her a few more pieces to work into the fragmentary picture she had already in mind. How much her father must think of Buena Esperanza to have used her as a pawn—a pawn protected, but, nevertheless, neither more nor less. She herself realized how much the rancho meant to her: why, it was life, existence, happiness, a world of happiness! What little she could do to keep it . . . was that too much to ask?

She said gravely, "I am being used as a carrot to induce a mule, father. But——"

What she intended to say was, "But I do not mind. It will be pleasant to laugh at don Ygnacio when he learns the truth, and the grant and other business is all settled."

The padre nodded slightly. "Only be careful," he muttered. "Don Ygnacio is more perilous than any man you have ever seen. Perhaps your father is using you, but Cienega would use you otherwise."

"Why, how will he use me, then?" Hilarita asked. She was vaguely ill at ease. Fra Juan shammed stupid. All he added was, "We will all take care of you. Now . . . what brought you here?"

She whispered to him.

"I am very glad," the padre said. He bent and kissed her. "That is from . . . yes, from an old man who loves you, just as the blessing comes from Him who loves you also. . . ."

When she rose to go, he asked, "Don Ygnacio will not hear of your betrothal?"

She told him how Ricardo had announced his re-

quest; she smiled, but the padre's face was very grave.

"The news will spread like wind blows seed. There is no use in asking an Indian to keep another's secret, and the *apartadores* must have heard what Ricardo said. The fat is probably in the caldron by now. . . . Well, we must think of something else. Be very happy, Hilarita."

His thin hand went to her bowed head. When the girl looked up, she saw that the padre's eyes were wet. She wanted to say something to him—what, she did not know; she tried to smile, and knew that her own eyes burned with tears. She slipped her hand into his, bent and kissed the spare fingers, then, without a backward glance, ran from the mission.

XIII

THE sun was low as the three riders mounted the last rise before reaching el rancho Buena Esperanza, and the sky glorious with color. Bright as were the westward heavens against the dark line of redwoods, don Ygnacio Cienega, *teniente* of Mexico and California, rivaled them. His uniform of bottle-green, threaded with cerise, his glittering epaulets, his gold-hilted and gold-tasseled sword, should have dazzled *any* girl. What effect they had upon Hilarita del Valle the officer did not know.

And why? The devil was in that speechless old Silencio! Did don Ygnacio but spur to Hilarita's side, and the silent ancient behind them spurred up also, although a moment before he had been twenty paces in the rear.

Could a man speak of lips like roses, or eyes like stars, or cheeks like pink marble, when an idiot rode so close that you could hear him breathe—hear him snort like a cow?

Once, when several *Indios* appeared from nowhere, their coiled hair stuck through with many painted sticks of laurel, he had snarled them into the undergrowth again, and, feeling this the proper and auspicious time for something like "All of your life, *carita*, I will protect you with the sword and power of my

great burning love" had ridden very close . . . but not close enough to avoid the speechless one.

Don Ygnacio's temper was not very good. That del Valle had requested a new and final grant he knew well enough, since knowing things was his business, and while it made him feel that don Estevan did not trust him sufficiently, he considered it of little importance. Buena Esperanza . . . there was a rancho! A good hacienda, well stocked with everything a man could desire, thousands of fat cattle, the richest meadowland don Ygnacio had ever seen, casks of delicious wine, and a pretty wife to meet one with a cup of it after a day in the warm hills . . . all delayed because of a fool, an idiot, whom don Ygnacio would have gladly jerked from his horse and beaten had the speechless man not been Hilarita's own servant. The officer showed restraint; he marked the interference just the same in his mind, and intended to go into the matter at greater length later.

Hilarita, if she realized what was going on, which she did, gave no sign. She answered Cienega pleasantly, seemed unaware that anything curious was happening. More than once she was forced to bite her lip as Cienega's flow of passionate words were dried up by don Silencio's immediate appearance.

As they topped the rise, she said quietly, "Don Silencio, please ride ahead, and tell my father that a guest has returned with me."

The silent old man looked at her, nodded placidly, and, riding around her through the brush, went rapidly toward Buena Esperanza.

For the first time in many minutes the *teniente's* eyes lighted. Trust a woman, *verdad*, to keep a caballero in hot water as long as possible! Well, it would be a different dance, before very long. This had been her hour, and, politician that he was, he did not begrudge it to her. It came to him that her words expressed vastly more than their meaning: she was giving him his chance—inviting him to take it now—where she need not have. The epaulets and the bottle-green uniform had done their work. Remembering other conquests, he decided that green and gold were his colors; he would stick to them in the future. Yes; he had always been successful in this combination. He had usually been successful . . . even in the plum-purple uniform which had never properly draped his shoulders . . .

He pulled the points of his mustache out stiffly, but before he could voice the preliminary "Ah, señorita!" the girl began to speak.

Hilarita had decided that it would be a mistake for Cienega to hear of the betrothal at the hacienda, as he surely would. Better for her to tell him, frankly, honestly; no matter what he was, he was at least, or most, a caballero. She did not like the officer; she liked him even less than her acting as a sweet trap for him. This dislike was not connected in any way with whatever the *teniente* might be planning, nor with the way he treated Fra Juan: it was a closer, more intimate thing.

His pretty speeches, by very repeating, lost whatever tang they might have originally had; his com-

plete foppishness was never to be missed by the keen girl. What passed for the manners and the attire of the court became little more than an acted part. Don Ygnacio, she believed, had never been and would never be frank about anything—the more reason why she should be.

Cienega had ridden close beside her, which was just as well, for she spoke in a low voice, carefully; she did not know how important her words, her manner of saying them, might prove later.

"I find that . . . I must tell you something, don Ygnacio," she said. "You are . . . are you not? . . . my friend"—she put out her hand, and he took it instantly. "It . . . it is not the usual . . . the proper . . . thing for me . . . for me to do, but . . . I must tell you . . . tell you . . ."

Perfect, no? *Esto va de veras!* The girl, don Ygnacio decided, was afraid that he would not announce his intentions! Actually helping him! For a moment he half believed that he would change them, finding the fruit so ripe and so ready to fall; he had seen women afire with love before, and . . . this notion he discarded before it was fairly in mind.

He said no word; the situation was too delicious for him to utter a sound. He contented himself with twining his fingers about the girl's.

The fretting he had done about that young de la Torre—all needless. But could one expect a girl to admire a man who dressed like . . . like a Californian? He himself, once he was married, would continue as he was. It would be pleasant to be able to

order jackets and vests from Madrid's finest shops; he had a friend or two who would see to the proper colorings . . . He might even pay the last bills contracted for before leaving Spain, unless his father had done it for him, which was hardly likely. Cienega the elder liked the gold well; would he be apt to settle debts contracted for by a son well over the legal age?

They rode without words, while Hilarita tried for a better opening. She wanted to draw her hand away from the officer's; as he began to stroke the palm of it with his hot thumb she tried vainly not to shiver. Don Ygnacio, believing she was trembling with delight, continued his fondling.

"You see, don Ygnacio . . . You see"—she must make it easy for him, and leave him satisfied with her explanation and still friendly toward her father—"a girl has . . . no control over her . . . affections"—how silly it sounded; she did not really believe that he misunderstood her—"and so I must . . . tell you . . ."

She paused, halted her horse.

The sun had slipped into fog far out on the Pacific; the sky had turned to the color of lilacs, lavender and blue and rose near the invisible water, glowing white above. Prodding into the heavens, the line of redwoods, black now, were as the unmoving waves of a fairy magic sea.

The time had come. Don Ygnacio, his free hand to his mustache, his eyes on the lovely flushed face, could wait no longer. He said, ardent, breathless, "Ah, little beloved one . . ."

"Hush!" Hilarita said swiftly, urgently.

Even in that instant of surprised chagrin, even as he leaned toward her, Cienega heard what had startled the girl: shrill shouts, unmistakably frightened and excited, coming from the direction of Buena Esperanza.

Hilarita urged her horse forward. The officer found it difficult even to keep her in sight. Around the sharp curves of the brush-bordered path she flew, leaning low, Indian-fashion, over her horse; she whispered, "Faster! Faster!" in his ear. It was as if his heels could take her from the presence of the *teniente*, as if she were escaping the caress which had been intended. She had almost felt the sharp point of his mustache against her cheek. Had she not herself escaped from the horns of the bull, seen danger and death close, she would have paid little attention to the character of the shouts: as it was, she gave them a disastrous meaning, as compelling to her as the flight from Cienega's arms and lips.

She did not understand, and had no time to do it, why don Ygnacio had become so ardent, how he had interpreted her words.

Across the beaten clay before the hacienda she tore, and up to a group of men. As she swung unaided to the ground they stepped back.

Ricardo was kneeling on the ground. His arms were about don Estevan, who lay on the bare clay. For a moment the girl swayed, seemed about to totter, while phrases hammered their import into her ears. A loose rope . . . horse's leg . . . stumble . . . the hoofs of a second horse . . . don Estevan dragged . . .

The earth rocked up to her; with a little throaty sob she dropped to her knees.

She was afraid even to whisper, "Is he——?" to Ricardo.

Don Estevan's eyes opened. He said feebly, "My legs . . . my arms . . . my chest . . . but it takes more . . . to kill a del Valle . . ."

"He will not die," Ricardo muttered, impressed by don Estevan's faith.

Strangely, unaware whether her father would live or not, there came to Hilarita the padre Juan's unfinished sentence: "It is good that Estevan has a good head and broad shoulders, or——" Hilarita's teeth clicked together. Her father would live. He must live. She . . . she would not let him die! Furious prayers rushed to her lips. And while don Estevan recovered—she guessed how terribly injured he must be from the gravity of Ricardo's face—she, Hilarita, who should have been his son, would be whatever protection or safeguard Buena Esperanza needed.

Cholos lifted don Estevan tenderly; as they were carrying him toward the house Cienega reached the hacienda. He took in the situation at a glance. Who better than he, now, should issue orders? True, Hilarita had not assented in so many words, but heart (he poetically and confidently believed) had already spoken to heart; more, Hilarita had as much as said that she loved him, and could not continue to exist without him.

He was glad that he had taken no actual steps to prevent certification of the del Valle grant of Buena Esperanza to the authorities. It was not too late to

do so now—but what need was there, what need had there ever been? Much pleasanter merely to step in as overlord of the rancho's leagues of land and herds of cattle . . . and youthful, vivacious mistress as well.

The last letter he had written his father explained, in answer to the definite query, that he would soon be the owner of a valuable rancho, probably the richest in either California, and (he used no additional noun) of a rich and lovely woman as well—none of your brown Indians, who were well enough in their places, as on a campaign, but of a good family, of the *gente de razón*. The family name was del Valle, and while Ygnacio did not recall the name, every one in California said that it had once meant something in Spain.

Cienega was about to command the servants to carry their master with greater care, when he saw that Hilarita's hand was locked in de la Torre's. His mouth opened angrily, but he had no opportunity to speak; he did not even have time to step to the girl's side and replace—as was his right!—that young ass of a de la Torre.

Don Estevan's eyes had flickered open; they blinked as if the white sky pained them with its brightness. Unreasoning they were, or seemed to be, and fevered. Politics, conciliation, Fra Juan's earnestly reiterated advice, the requested certification of the old grant, Hilarita alone in the hacienda as protectress of Buena Esperanza if he should die, all were without meaning to the ranchero. He looked about blankly. From face to face his eyes went. He looked at Hilarita, and past her as if she might have been a stranger; at Ricardo,

and away; the *apartadores* Miguel and Gabriel and Rafael might have been servants of some other master. When his vacant eyes came to don Silencio his forehead puckered; just as Hilarita and the others thought he was about to speak, the bright plumage of Cienega, green and scarlet and gold, attracted him. His forehead smoothed. The dull eyes seemed almost understanding. His lips moved in a mumble, and, at the moment none expected any word actually to issue from them, he said, clearly, for all to hear:

“Parrot!”

XIV

ON THE hill behind the hacienda the pear-trees grew ; acre by acre of bent trunks, whose long unpruned branches, tied at the top, took shapes like fluttering candle-flames. Beyond these was uncultivated land, in the same condition as when Buena Esperanza was first settled—a waste of gray-green manzanita and mimulus not yet in flower.

It was a very silent night of enormous white stars, but without a moon. These stars were so thickly spread, so hot and clear, that there was light enough for de la Torre to see the pale oval of Hilarita's face.

Even the servants were asleep—Indians who had no arduous labors, and who were ready to talk much of the night away. Buena Esperanza had the usual number of helpers: three or four to grind grain, seven for the kitchen, a half-dozen to wash, and over a dozen (it was difficult ever to learn the exact number) to sew and spin and weave. To these *cholas* don Estevan was more than master: were they sick, he tended to their ailments, when their children were born he was the godparent (he never doubted what to call a youngster: all he needed to do was to bawl "Estevan!" and he was correct, save for those named after the padre); he gave them no pay, but all else they needed. Pay, money, would have been useless. The girls Hilarita

taught, with the help of the older servants; the boys don Estevan and the archangels mounted early upon horses, their goal the day the ranchero would give them, for their own, a little silver-mounted saddle. . . .

Don Estevan was the master, and yet even he was forced to abide with some of the customs of the Tahmahs.

Below, in the saw-pit, this night, four Indians accused of witchcraft by their fellows dragged their steel blade through the end of a redwood log, making crude wheels for a *carreta*. Ricardo and Hilarita could hear the minor jangle of the chains by which the Tahmahs were secured, could hear the hoarse grunts and guttural ejaculations.

The hacienda itself was dark. The one feeble light burned in don Estevan's room, where the ranchero lay day by day in semi-stupor. The presence of Indian servants set him to tossing and muttering; he tolerated Hilarita; only when don Silencio sat beside the great carved bed was he placid.

Hilarita stirred, and then said slowly, "The Indians grow more insolent each day. I believe they broke the wheels of the *carreta* purposely . . . and Fra Juan is waiting anxiously for the tallow."

"The ox-cart will be ready by morning," de la Torre told her. "As soon as the wheels are fashioned, we will have the holes burned through the centers, and you can start the loads to the mission at once."

"It is because they sneer at a woman," Hilarita decided. "When my father was on his feet there was no trouble. Even the women have a different attitude.

It is difficult to describe, but it exists. You have no such trouble at del Monte now, nor did we ever have it before."

Her face took on a very earnest expression; where don Ygnacio would have marked how becoming it was, this (he would have called it) immature gravity graven on beauty, de la Torre observed only the troubled eyes; he did not even discern how darkly lovely they had grown, but he did see that they were luminous, and knew, also, why.

"Are you certain of it?" he asked, the implication being that she might have imagined it.

The girl asked at once, "Do you have trouble at your rancho?" Ricardo was silent so long that she added, "If only you would talk more, Ricardo! You do not want to agree with what I said, and yet you will not lie about it . . . and I am not sorry you treat me like . . . not like a man, but like . . . like more than eyes and lips and . . ."

De la Torre flushed slightly. "I will never lie to you, dear one; I suppose I will never make a diplomat. Trouble . . . yes, we have had trouble with *los Indios* before, but it has never been serious, and has always disappeared. There does not seem to be any at del Monte now." He paused, raised his eyes, was silent so long that the girl concluded he had said all he would say, when he added soberly, "The past we can understand because it is over, the present should be clear to us, but the future . . . Look toward the north hills. What do you see?"

Her eyes followed his: "A little high cloud?" De

la Torre had never spoken in riddles; he had rarely said as much—or as little, despite the many words—as he had just done.

“Look more closely.”

She peered out over the dark hills. They were dark, black where the brush grew; the rounded tops were bare of trees, tonsured like a priest’s head. She saw nothing at first, and then said doubtfully, “Smoke?” She was by no means certain that it was, and stared, strained, to see something, or something else. She saw only hills. “You do not talk very much, Ricardo; when you do, I wish you might be plain!”

The Californian said quietly: “Before you came to Buena Esperanza, *niñita*, I often imagined that I was speaking; I peopled the forest with imaginary children, and held long conversations with them; sometimes I was myself, sometimes the playfellow I had manufactured. As I grew a little older, I still did this, only it did not seem necessary actually to make the words audible. . . . It was very lonely, but I do not suppose I felt that way about it. And when I played with the Tah-mah boys, we never spoke; you know how *los Indios* are. Now, it seems to have become a habit. I imagine that you, my very dearest, can read my thoughts . . .”

“As you read mine?” curiously.

Very gravely, “Sometimes.” He was restless; he had spoken, explained, with effort; it seemed to him that he was uncovering, for her, what had always been hidden. “You see . . .”

He paused, and then uncrossed his long legs.

"Smoke," he said abruptly. "I have seen it night after night. Now one column, now two, sometimes even three or four. At different places. The Indians are restless. Marin and Quintin tell them strange tales. These chiefs say that the gods of the Tah-mahs—how many of them there are I have never learned—are angry, and these children of the hills believe them, as they believed the tales I invented when I was a boy.

"If a cloud turns yellow at sunset, it is because *wek-wek*, the falcon, hates the white people—yellow is the color of hatred. When the cloud turns red, it means that the falcon wishes the land peopled with the red people again—desires the white to disappear, and be replaced with his own worshipers.

"Do they find a clover with four leaves in a meadow, *hah-ki-ah*, the four-pronged elk, is angered because we have been killing his followers for food. It has even gone further than that; the little folk, the *se-kah*, have been said to have shown themselves. Quintin told one of our servants, who told me, that no Tah-mah can be killed in battle after the *se-kah* have made their appearance.

"I do not want to frighten you, Hilarita *mia*, but . . . I love you too much to conceal anything."

Her hand slid into his.

"I will tell Fra Juan," she said uneasily. "He will talk to the chiefs. It is all so silly, so foolish."

"Not silly to them. The padre has already been shot at, and I think by Marin's own order. The Indians do not resent the padres, but the soldiers who . . . steal the Tah-mah women are angering the braves more

every day. Once Fra Juan was able to keep both *soldados* and *Indios* in check; the first with orders, the second with gifts. The Mexicans do not care for orders, and Fra Juan's supply of red cloth and trinkets is gone. . . .

"You wanted me to talk; I have."

Hilarita nodded. She revolved the words in her head, and brought them at last to her own case: "And if the Tah-mahs make trouble—more serious trouble—you believe that they will first visit Buena Esperanza, since my father is hurt, defenseless, and I am only a woman."

"Ricardo's silence was sufficient answer.

"But if we were married, dear one, that danger would no longer exist?" she questioned gently.

De la Torre's fingers tightened about her own. "You do not want that. You love me, yes. Equally with that, you want to show don Estevan that you, as well as he, can manage the rancho. I—I can not say that I blame you . . . and . . ."

Lips like butterfly-wings brushed his cheek.

"You understand me . . . perhaps that is why I love you so!"

"I love you well enough to listen to what my mother will say after I return home so late," he laughed, glad that she wanted to hear no more, tingling with the frank and earnest declaration.

"I may prove a worse tyrant!"

Fingers tightened; bodies swayed closer together.

The girl spoke in a small voice, "Fra Juan said, 'Be happy.' . . . I once said that to my father, and he

was . . . he *is*! I—I am happy already, Ricardito. When my father is well again, I will be almost too happy. Until he recovers, I will see to it that Buena Esperanza is not neglected. He loves the land—you can not imagine how much, dear one.”

“He loves it because he has made it what it is.”

“Perhaps.” She let her head come to Ricardo’s shoulder, thrilled, and lay still. In a low voice she went on, “Did you hear him call don Ygnacio a parrot? How angry the word made our fine *teniente*! I wonder why? And then did you hear don Ygnacio cry ‘Is *that* who you are?’ and rush away, leaving my poor father almost dead after his terrible fall?”

“It was strange. Don Ygnacio was certainly provoked.”

Strange it had been; de la Torre did not understand Cienega’s wildness at the word—don Estevan doubtless had spoken in fever, and the green and gold of the officer might have recalled to his wandering thoughts the bird of similar plumage. It did not seem possible that the word could be considered insulting, although Ricardo knew the officer was proud of his attire, and that it took little (from the stories of the del Monte Indians who went to the mission) to anger him. But the transition from pleasant manners, which don Ygnacio had always shown, to what approximated crudity—spurring away from the hacienda, with don Estevan almost unconscious, was too swift to have been accidental, or uncaused. De la Torre did not shrug his shoulders, although he thought that, so far as Cienega’s temper was concerned, it made little difference.

"That word must have meant something to him," Hilarita murmured. "I wonder what it might have been? It had meaning . . . I am certain it had meaning."

"Why?"

"Don Ygnacio was not angry when we rode home from San Rafael." Her eyes became roguish. "Not even a word of farewell did he say to me when he left, although earlier in the evening he wanted . . ."

"What?"

"This, oh, stupid one!"

A second time her lips brushed his cheek. He slipped his arm about her. Hilarita's eyes closed; she may have sighed. Lips met, and clung together.

"And what . . . would your mother . . . say to . . . that?" she breathed at last.

"I would rather not think about it," the Californian said unsteadily. "All I can think about, wonder about, is why—how—you can—love me."

She pressed her cheek against his.

"Because you are a great goose," she told him.

The rasp of the long saw stopped abruptly, followed immediately by the thud of the released circular block which would become the wheel for the crude cart. The chains rattled rustily (the Indians were locked to them in all weather) as the bound Tah-mahs squatted down to rest. Then complete silence.

The lovers sat hand in hand under the pear-trees. A dropping leaf cracked in the silence like a whip. It seemed as if the smoke-columns in the north were almost audible.

The hills were purple-black sapphires in the night; the valleys and canyons were so intensely dark that they seemed of unnamed color. Buena Esperanza's hacienda, creamy in starlight, showed one window—don Estevan's—like a glowing oblong of sheeted light. The quarters of the servants were all dark.

At the moment when Hilarita stirred and lifted her face to him again, de la Torre released her hand suddenly, touched a finger to her lips, and then pointed swiftly toward the left. The girl started, controlled herself, and, in that instant understood the desire for secrecy, from Ricardo's touch upon her mouth. She stared up the hill, but, try as she could, saw nothing.

Her ears directed her eyes. She heard a little noise, no more than a leaf, a pebble, under foot.

Up at the far edge of the pear-orchard it was; her eyes ached with straining. Was *that* a tree? Was it? No: it moved; she was sure that it moved. The dark irregular shape against the hill suddenly became darker as it ~~was~~ against the starry sky. As she watched, knowing that the figure was that of a savage, a second Indian appeared, mysteriously, all at once, from nowhere. A third, and then a fourth. The weird and awful tales of the *cholas* flashed through her head, about the little people who could hide under the ground . . .

The first Tah-mah was the tallest; his round painted sticks thrust through his hair gleamed with paint. She knew that it was Quintin, and that the stubby powerful shape silhouetted beside him was Marin, chief of the tribe. She supposed that the Indians had crawled

along the ground; she knew, however, that if they had been doing that they would have heard Ricardo and herself talking earlier; they must, she decided abruptly, have come out of some hidden cave. This was why they were unaware of their white watchers: they had heard nothing. Had they crept along the hillside, or down from the crest, they could not have missed what man and girl had been saying; they would never, now, be so at ease.

Neither Ricardo nor Hilarita moved. De la Torre's knife had appeared noiselessly from under his jacket, although he kept it carefully covered from the betraying starlight. He breathed in her ear, "Don't move!" She had no intention of doing so, but the command set her nerves doubly on edge. Anxiety, fear, more for the sleeping hacienda than for either Ricardo or herself, made her fight down the desire to say, "Do you think I am a little fool?"

The four naked Tah-mahs stood together. Once squat Marin pointed toward the columns of smoke, and Quintin answered with an unintelligible mutter; then the four started slowly, without noise, down the hill and toward the saw-pit.

Ricardo's eyes were bright.

"They are at some work of the devil," he whispered. "You know how they ordinarily fear any one accused of witchcraft, as the sawyers are. . . ."

He waited until the jangle of chains told that the visiting Tah-mahs were in the saw-pit. Then, drawing Hilarita to her feet, he followed them swiftly, the girl at his side. At the lower edge of the orchard he

said very softly, "Go to the hacienda. Awaken Miguel, Rafael, Gabriel, don Silencio also. Tell them to come to the pit." Reassuringly, "I will only watch what they do, hear what they say. I will stay hidden, dear one; you need not warn me."

She smiled at him, since she had been about to do that very thing, and then sped down the hillside like a pale ghost. He watched, ready to leap after her at the sight of any pursuing Indian, until the blackness of the hacienda swallowed her up.

No word of fear, no remonstrance at going alone with the Indians about. . . . Ah, so brave, so brave! His eyes were soft, but they hardened automatically as he began to walk carefully to the thicket just above the saw-pit; then he doubled his caution. He was no coward: he did no more than understand the odds.

The jangle of the chains was protection against the Tah-mahs hearing the crackle of snapped twigs. He achieved a position directly above the pit without detection.

Sparkles of reflected light showed him the giant saw at once. It was more difficult, in the dark pit, with the stars in his eyes, to determine the chained figures from those of the free Indians. Whatever was said he could not make out, although it seemed to be pleasing to the prisoners. Once Quintin laughed—a sudden grim sound, more like the explosive exhalation of air than any mirth. The *carreta* wheels—de la Torre could see the four of them on the ground, like stacked cheeses—were pointed to again and again, but the white man sensed that the chained Indians disagreed with

whatever reference was made to them. He sensed also that the chief's next words had nothing to do with cart-wheels, for one of the captives clucked with satisfaction.

What the chief produced from a deerskin makeshift sack made de la Torre grim with anger—a leather-covered bottle and four drinking-cups; all, the ranchero knew, stolen from San Rafael Arcangel. The cups were filled, and handed to the chained savages. As each dipped a finger into the liquid, and sprinkled the drops to the north, de la Torre caught a glimpse of Marin's demoniac face. His own fingers tightened about the haft of the long knife.

De la Torre knew that even had the chiefs been able to free the Tah-mahs from their chains, and so hamper future work at the rancho, the prisoners would not have dared escape: all it would mean would be death at the hands of their fellows. Nor did he see clearly what Marin and Quintin had in mind, although he was casting about for their reason.

He thought he heard the hurrying footsteps of the *apartadores* from the hacienda, but was not certain.

Four liquor-filled cups rose high above thirsty mouths. Four Indians—the chief himself, Quintin, and their two followers, stepped beside the drinking men.

De la Torre's tongue clove to the roof of his mouth.

He leaped down into the saw-pit, unreasoning, wild with fury; four knives had flashed, and the chained Tah-mahs' drafts of the stolen beverage had been their last. The great saw fell with a clang as a stabbed

sawyer dropped over it. The chains, as if in protest of their wearers' dying, rattled furiously, not like iron but like hot bronze.

The Tah-mahs, engrossed in their horrible work of making death positive, did not see the Californian. . . .

His first blow, a haphazard wild lunge with the knife, used sword-fashion, took the nearest Indian before he had time to withdraw his own weapon from the writhing body of his chained victim.

Quintin saw him first: the Tah-mah screamed, "It is the god! The witch himself! He avenges the deed we did——"

But Marin, "Kill! Witches need no knives!"

Away from them *de la Torre* danced. His horror, his anger, had cooled; he knew he should have remained concealed; he might still have time to outdistance the Tah-mahs in a retreat to the hacienda, but this he would never do. Show them that he was afraid of them? Never in the world!

His knife made sweeping circles against which the Tah-mahs did not care to run. Rapidly, without a word, they made their plans; Quintin knelt, and began to crawl toward the white man; Marin faced him openly; the wounded Tah-mah dashed in and out furiously; the fourth of the savages had slipped away. *De la Torre* knew that he would see nothing more of him, know nothing more of him until he felt the knife between his shoulder-blades. The thought of the first blow was not as terrible as what would follow—all of them on him, hacking out his life as they killed a bullock, and then ripping the dead body again and again.

What a way to die! He, Ricardo de la Torre, who was to protect his loved ones, to die in a saw-pit, knifed by *los Indios*! He thought bitterly of the many times, long ago, when he had imagined valiant deeds, all of which resulted in defending Hilarita.

Yet he felt no regret at his descent into the pit.

Devils, these Tah-mahs! Killing chained, powerless men—men—like oxen! Like they would kill him before very long.

His eyes burned as he watched, all at once, the three attackers before him. Of the other Indian he knew nothing, and could do nothing.

Marin's breath came gaspingly from his thick ape-like chest; if the chief's face had been fiendish, livid, before, it was now like nothing above the ground or on it. The long eyes were as red as human eyes could ever be; the nostrils in the broad nose wriggled with every breath, as if they were blown apart by the force of it issuing from the barrel-chest. Quintin, lithe, had no intention of a dash which would bring disaster; Marin would advance relentlessly. So, at least, the cornered de la Torre believed.

The ranchero was cold as ice. He was, it appeared, about to die. Well, he would wait death no longer. Rather die going forward, from wounds given face to face, than from a blade sunk into him from behind. More, he believed that he might take Marin with him, and, with luck, Quintin also. Once the chiefs, the guiding and evil spirits of the tribe, were killed, and Buena Esperanza, the mission, the rancheros, would be safe.

He balanced his body, intent upon springing the distance separating him from the two chiefs. The thing to do was to slash Marin first, then drop upon Quintin. . . .

One of the sawyers, not quite dead, moaned.

The sound hung in de la Torre's ears; he fought for control, steadied himself, was almost in the air, when the changing expression of Marin's face stopped him like a wall. Rage had disappeared into a curious blending of fear, frustration, greater and unnamable fury, and a final fierceness not to be described.

Before de la Torre could understand, a great voice cried, "*Santiago!*" A sword sang . . . Marin was running heavily, Quintin was on his feet and after him (passing him at the edge of the pit), the wounded Indian had already disappeared.

Apartadores tore up the hill after them, but the naked *Indios* outdistanced them. De la Torre followed rapidly, and found the men from Buena Esperanza hacking at no more than pear-trees. He started to say, "I know how they escaped," but, instead, began to search for the spot at which Marin's heavily-running figure had vanished—the selfsame place where it had earlier appeared so miraculously.

A few minutes convinced him that the only way to find the place would be first to find the tree beneath which Hilarita and himself had sat, and then determine the direction in which the savages had first been seen. This, he knew, was not the time to do it. Nor would it be wise to explain the tryst in the starlight—which would be forgotten, if any one wondered how Hilarita

had come with the news—in the present excitement. Repetition would only be reason to remember it. The place of disappearance could surely be found easily in daylight, once the approximate position was found.

Ricardo ordered the *apartadores* to give over their valiant battle with tree-trunks (curiously like the figures of men in the night) and returned to the pit. Curious that one could forget the nearness of death so rapidly!

Don Silencio was sitting placidly astride the redwood log, efficiently cleaning his blade.

"You came just in time," de la Torre thanked him simply. "When I heard you cry 'Santiago!' my heart leaped."

The old man, smiling, stared at him.

"You did cry out," Ricardo insisted stubbornly.

Don Silencio shrugged, as if to say that one might imagine anything at all in such a time of stress. He shook his head, when de la Torre repeated his statement, in emphatic dissent.

"Have it as you will," Ricardo said.

The creeping Tah-mah (who had been approaching in the rear of the pit to knife de la Torre) was not yet dead from don Silencio's blow. The men of the rancho carried him to the house against their will. Don Ricardo's order they obeyed, but why not merely bury the murderer with the four sawyers, and thus save additional and useless labor? The archangels—Rafael, Miguel and Gabriel, would have gladly buried the two chiefs, had they been able to capture them, along with their subject. They would have buried them dead;

had they been caught alive, they would have seen no reason (despite Fra Juan's teachings) not to have buried them in that condition.

XV

GREAT tallow candles sputtered at the hacienda's doorway. Against the mild radiance was Hilarita's dim figure.

De la Torre, striding beside don Silencio, saw the round of her mantilla-cloaked head, the pure gray moon of her face; he watched with quick awe the slow upward movement of her arms, outstretched to him.

At her smile, the archangels caught breath together. Like the Lady at San Rafael, eh? Not a miracle, exactly, but something to make simple *apartadores* find their hearts beating faster. They had always been don Estevan's children; now, they silently found, in a sort of reverential fear, that they were the servants of the señorita also.

"Come inside," she said to them all. Her eyes clung to Ricardo's, although she touched Don Silencio's hand. "Thank you—thank you all," she said. "When I heard Ricardo cry '*Santiago!*' I knew that you had arrived in time. . . . Now we must try to tell don Estevan."

Don Estevan, master of Buena Esperanza, was stretched at full length on his bed. His black eyes stared at nothing; he did not move (he never did save when disturbed, since the accident) until don Silencio pressed his hand. Then he turned slowly, to meet the eyes of the other.

The blank stare slowly and curiously dissolved, as if reason fought for ascendancy in the distressed brain. At the height of his effort the injured *hacendado* saw Hilarita; he smiled naturally, recognizing her for the first time, and said, "*Asi fuese mañana!* To-morrow I shall be well again."

She came over to the bed swiftly.

"We are trying to get the load of tallow to Fra Juan, but the wheels of the *carreta* were broken, and when new ones were being made——"

Brokenly he asked, "Tallow? *Sebo* . . . or *manteca*? I promised Fra Juan . . . he needs the value of it for the government . . . Wheels? Wheels? What wheels? Ah, that head of mine turns like wheels . . ."

In a rush of words Hilarita, eager to have his assistance and opinion, told what had happened, concluding, "And why should the chiefs slaughter the poor chained ones, my father?"

Don Estevan had half risen in his bed. All thought that anger directed his words, although the blazing eyes should have told them a different tale.

"*Indios! Mexicanos!* Rules . . . grants . . . certifications . . . anything to take away my land . . . parrots! Parrots!" Don Silencio, listening to the fevered harangue, shivered, and made a noise in his throat. "I keep my land! I have no sons to fight for it, but *I* can fight! *Dios*, Andres, but we fought parrots before, you and I. There were too many of them for us. . . . I always believed you were one of them, but it is possible that you flew with them merely to be able

to tell me what . . . Ah, 'Rita, 'Rita, to think that what started in a jest when you were a baby . . . Hilarita, fight for my land"—his voice rising like wind in organ-pipes—"fight for my land, do anything, but keep what belongs to the del Valles for the del Valles! It was stolen from them once; keep it now!"

Hilarita's face was very white.

"What is the del Valles' will always belong to them," she promised.

Don Silencio again made a rattling noise.

"The fever is in him," de la Torre whispered. "He does not know——"

"Hush," Hilarita said.

Don Estevan slipped down in his bed, the fire smoldering out. The silent old Silencio sat beside him, and began to bathe his face with cool water. None spoke, until a *cholo* came to Hilarita, saying that the wild Indian captured by don Ricardo would live but moments longer. Hard on this advice, the *apartadores* dragged the dying Tah-mah to the doorway of the room.

The Tah-mah was dying, and not happily. His fear was not in his going, but in the after events: was he to be thrown into the ground, after the fashion of the white men, to return to the earth as a worm? Unless his body was burned, what chance had he of being blown by the wind over the great waters to the great land of the dead? He was being afforded even less opportunity for future happiness than the *Indios* of the mission, who at least heard the words of the man of the brown robe. . . . In place of the earnest voice of

Fra Juan, the shrill cry of a loyal woman-servant—Antonia, involving every pagan and newer devil, battered at the Tah-mah's ears. The threatening faces of Miguel, Gabriel and Rafael were close to his, as if they rejoiced at his facing torment as a creeping worm.

Ricardo bent over him.

"I have seen you before," he said. "Do you remember, *Indio*? It was very cold, and my house sheltered you from *nuk-kah*, the rain, and *sah-win-ne*, the hail. . . . You are dying now, *Indio*, and what will you tell the underworld people? What will they say when they learn you have killed a man cursed by the witches, a man chained and defenseless?"

The Tah-mah's eyes did not waver.

"You are going to Oo-ta-yo-me, the village of the dead," de la Torre continued quietly. "And you will exist there only as *po-ko-moo*, the poisonous spider. Men will run from you. You will have no women, and no children, save crawling things like yourself. You will eat of bugs. And one of the men you killed will grind you under his foot——"

"You lie," the Tah-mah said weakly, although what the ranchero said was confirming his own fears. "My chief talked with the gods. It was a good act to kill the men. Marin has said it."

"Did you hear Marin speak with the gods?"

"Only chiefs can hear the gods' voices. . . . Leave me to die, white man."

De la Torre, sympathetic, bore down on the work in hand. "Even if you destroyed the new wheels, we could carry the loads to San Rafael on horses, *Indio*."

The savage was failing fast. "If the . . . witchmen in chains . . . had allowed us . . . to break the wheels . . . they would still be alive," he said jerkily. "They would have . . . shouted to you . . . had we smashed the wheels when their eyes could see . . . so . . . Marin said we must . . ."

"It was a brave act," Gabriel said harshly.

Rafael had a knife in his hand. "Let *me* talk to him, don Ricardo," he pleaded. "I will have the truth out of him—or something else!"

The stricken Tah-mah did not hear him; he was fumbling in his long hair; whatever he took out he kept concealed in his hand. He had seen Hilarita. What he said Ricardo translated swiftly for the girl.

"He says, 'I am the first Tah-mah you saw,' Hilarita. He asks you, for the sake of whatever he has in his hand, to let him be burned by his brothers and father. He says——"

De la Torre stopped.

The Indian suddenly tore at his captors; his voice changed pitch as he jerked out words of loathing and defiance and obscene blasphemy from his bluing lips. At the very end he shouted, "Carts . . . horses with loads . . . all we can stop. The men-of-your-god came here first, and you followed them. You will follow them after we have driven them away. You will——"

He said nothing after that.

Hilarita crossed herself hastily; she stooped, and picked up the string of blue beads which had rolled from the Tah-mah's hand.

"I remember when I gave it to him," she said. "He only did what he was told, the poor one, and what he must have believed. I am glad you were gentle with him, Ricardo." Her head came up swiftly. "Miguel—Gabriel—Rafael! You have heard what he has said? Don Estevan is injured; he can do nothing. But will *you* allow these savages to force good Fra Juan away? Fra Juan, who intercedes for you, who has your sins forgiven? And . . . will you fight with me to keep Buena Esperanza from again becoming a wilderness?"

She moved them; there was no question of it. They did not make the room ring with shouts; all three scraped their toes on the floor-tiles.

"We . . . we will kill you two Tah-mahs . . . for each sawyer," Rafael finally blurted out.

Hilarita smiled wearily, shaking her head.

"Not that," she said. "Only——"

"Only when the time comes," de la Torre told them.

Don Estevan, in the great bed, rumbled in his beard, almost as if he understood. They all turned and faced him. His eyes were open, and for once not on Don Silencio, who sat silently beside him. They thought he smiled, but (so close was he between reason and delirium) he said, "Well, Ricardo, this is a pretty late hour for you to be a-visiting! Think: what will doña Luisa have to say about us—you for being here, and me for permitting it? I know what love is . . . but it is time for you to be riding home over the hills. Yes, time. Time. If . . . if you see any parrots flying, shoot me one of them, eh? Now, home with you! No, Hilarita had better stay here in

the house with me; there is probably a moon, and I know the effect it would have. Moons are very good at times, but also are . . . are . . . Ricardo . . . Andres . . . very late, very tired . . . sleep . . .”

Ricardo, his eyes troubled, bowed to the unseeing don Estevan, motioned to Miguel to remove the body of the Tah-mah from the doorway, whispered a word to Hilarita, and then left swiftly. The sound of his horse's hoof-beats faded away before the girl kissed her father's blank eyes and went to her own room.

She prepared for bed rapidly, but, once ready, sat tensely on a chair.

What did it all mean? And what would come of it? If the Indians intended to drive Fra Juan—the padres—away, it would be some time before they attacked any of the ranchos. How did Marin know that Fra Juan needed the loads of tallow to make his payments of the new government demands? What warped brains the savages had—how foolishly they reasoned! But . . . was there really sense in their figuring? No sense at all, so far as most of the mission-districts were concerned, but here, at San Rafael, it was different. Here the land was isolated, the presidio clear across the bay of San Francisco. . . .

She must get the tallow to the mission in the morning.

It seemed that don Estevan, when he spoke last, and was jesting about the late hour, was himself again. . . .

Nothing, she supposed, would hurt him so much as losing Buena Esperanza. Well, he need not fear losing the rancho; she, Hilarita, was del Valle enough to see

to that. Besides, she had Ricardo to consult, to . . . to lean against.

She wished that she might do that very thing now, until she remembered that she was ready for bed. After a moment, she said half aloud, "I hope . . . he thinks . . . I am . . . not ugly." The thought turned her breathless, absurdly happy. It was some time before she was able to recall the trouble at hand.

She was glad that don Estevan himself had sent the message requesting certification of the grant. Once that arrived at Buena Esperanza, all gold ribbon and red seal, the worry over it would be at an end. It was, true, a formality, and nothing more, but the feel of the stiff parchment would be comforting, assuring.

When don Ygnacio at last heard about Ricardo then the tallow would indeed be in the try-pots!

She walked slowly across the room, and knelt before the little figure of the Lady brought from Spain. As she prayed, she had a corner of her brain alert, to wonder how many times her mother, Hilaria, had prayed to the sorrowful figure also . . .

At last she crept into bed.

She was unable to avoid thinking of the promises don Ygnacio had made: the court of Spain (apparently he was ready to change masters again, if it would bring him anything!) and its courtiers; she would (he had told her) find it nothing to play with a dozen nobles at once. . . . That was what *he* wanted her for—a play-toy, a pretty bit of delectability. He would be willing to use her, as Fra Juan had said, but in more ways than one. The very thought turned her hot.

She lay with wide eyes, her body taut in the cool bed.

A little wind from the Pacific stirred the laurel; she was able to relax, to smile at last, as she remembered Ricardo's kiss in the pear-orchard. Strange; what was offensive to think of in Cienega was delightful in Ricardo! She did not understand it; she was becoming too drowsy to try.

Whispers roused her.

"Sleep now, Rafael; I watch until midnight, and then Miguel will come——"

And then Rafael's voice, "If you see a Tah-mah with a painted stick stuck in his hair, call us both, and we will kill him without waking any one."

So the *apartadores*—the three archangels—were already guarding the house!

The thought half woke her. What a strange land it was . . . and she, a girl, was mistress; on her shoulders, snuggled into the bed-covering, lay the burden of protecting, retaining, Buena Esperanza's hills and valleys and wealth, which meant her father's happiness and contentment. The night had been too filled with excitement for her to remain awake long. She listened to the drip of water somewhere in the hacienda—drip—drip—drip; soon, like rain from the leaves in autumn, it soothed her completely.

Buena Esperanza, the murdered sawyers, don Ygnacio's passion and love-making, her injured father, Fra Juan, even Ricardo at the end, slowly dissolved into the soft monotonous sound of the falling drops.

The drip seemed to be slowly, miraculously, gathering into a pool—a great pool—a sea; she was drifting

on it placidly . . . a great deep black sea . . .
placid . . .

Her slender body relaxed; one arm curled about the
pillow.

A placid black sea . . .

The girl slept.

XVI

"DON ESTEVAN did not know me," don Patricio told Fra Juan. "Señorita Hilarita said that he spoke logically last night, but I find it very difficult to believe. I am not a doctor, although I dabbled a little in that also, before my family had too much of my dabbling, and——"

"My old friend is very sick," the padre agreed. "But, with care—and trust—all things are possible. I am glad you came with me this morning. Of course, I could explain matters to the señorita, but she knows that don Estevan trusts your judgment about worldly problems."

"No more than he does your own, father. My judgment is good, except where it concerns myself . . . but I am not the only Irishman in the world who can say that."

Fra Juan smiled. "I wish there were more like you, my son," he said. "Some day that land you have been preparing will house, as you have requested, many lonely and fatherless children.* The worst things any one ever says of you you say yourself. Only——"

"I like wine, father! Allow me one vice! If I did not have it, how could I come to you for confession?"

Fra Juan said honestly, "I would rather you had no need to come at all . . ."

*The land given by don Patricio now houses an orphanage, just north of San Rafael.

The two men had ridden early to Buena Esperanza, Fra Juan because the messenger from San Francisco Assisi had brought no relayed letter for del Valle—and the certification should have arrived—don Patricio because the padre had asked him.

The Irish don was dressed in the same color as the padre—brown; he seemed brown from head to foot, save only his florid face. He could, and did, vie with the younger rancheros in feats of horsemanship; he boasted that (even in his cups) he could place a silver coin under either foot, mount an unbroken horse, and never lose the coins. He permitted none to visit him, and the women of the district believed that Santa Antonia would be the better for household management. Whatever don Patricio thought of this he often asked what woman would allow him to go to bed in his boots—and, if he did not sometimes go in that manner, he would be forced to sleep on the floor. . . .

Señor Gonzales had even sent for an unmarried sister from Santa Clara, but without result. Don Patricio had found it necessary to ride the hills, sleeping (if one can believe it) at Indian rancherías, rather than be entertained . . . and married, since doña Luisa was a partner in the scheme.

If he had one greater fault than drinking, it was generosity: he outdid the open-handed Californians.

"Explain it simply," the gaunt padre suggested to don Patricio as they rode up to the hacienda. "The whole affair is so complicated that even I hardly understand it, and I have been thinking about it long. . . . There, she is coming."

Hilarita walked quickly to them; she seemed as fresh as if she had slept the usual long hours of the night.

"They make the holes in the wheels, Fra Juan," she said eagerly. "In less than an hour the *carreta*, fully loaded, will start for the mission. *Si es un momento* . . . it will only take a moment longer. And"—glancing slyly at the Irishman from Santa Antonia—"a woman did the directing."

"You can direct me any time you have the fancy," the delighted Irishman grinned, winking at the padre.

"I shall speak with don Ricardo about it," Hilarita answered gravely.

"*Y vas tú a presumir acaso?* Are you beginning to put on married airs already?" Don Patricio, laughing, said to Fra Juan, "You see how it is! I am always late. Here I rode all the way to Buena Esperanza with you, solely for the purpose of——"

"Perhaps you are not too late," Hilarita said, so demurely that don Patricio was almost startled. She brought his grin back with, "Although I trust that your declaration will be made in better Spanish, don Patricio."

"I could do it better in a language you do not understand," the Irishman said.

The girl looked at the ground. "I did not think that of you, señor don Patricio Callanan," she told him solemnly.

Callanan struggled for a proper retort, but the padre cut him short. "You had very little advantage in that exchange," he said. To Hilarita: "I never doubted but you would have the *manteca* for us, my daughter.

It was not worry over tallow which brought us here this morning."

Hilarita, in the ensuing pause, wondered instantly what the worry was. Fra Juan, searching for the exact words, thought the girl had, overnight, taken on maturity—and that it made her the lovelier.

"It is this," he declared, trying to make his voice light. "We have tried to talk matters over with your father, without success. So——"

"If you will only wait a little! We had some excitement last night, and it aroused him; he was really himself, I believe. He——"

Fra Juan said sharply: "What excitement was there here?"

She told him of the sawyers' deaths.

"It is a piece with all the rest," don Patricio muttered, since the padre was silent. "Yesterday, the messenger from San Francisco Assisi told us, four canoe-loads attacked one of the presidio canoes, and a *soldado* was killed. He did not go alone: one of his mates dropped the iron anchor on the head of one of the naked heathen, and several more were shot for the glory of God and the salvation of their own lives. I wish I had been there. I am growing fat with good living, and that is not the right thing for an Irishman." He looked around him, and then said in a chill voice, "The *Indios* make trouble everywhere, and it is puppets like Cienega who provoke them."

Fra Juan shrugged.

"What can you expect?" he asked. "If we only had more men like Fernando de Rivera; we did not ap-

preciate him when he lived! He will never be a saint, but I can find it in my heart to pray for him. Don Patricio, you love courage. Some day I will tell you the story which don Ramon—a de la Cuesta, with a story of his own, let me tell you!—which don Ramon told me at Monterey.

“But that is not why we are here. Hilarita, little daughter, may we come into the house? No? You are right: the less Estevan hears, until he is ready to hear it, the better. Let us walk about; the sun is not hot; don Patricio will explain some things to us.”

Hilarita's eyes became troubled, but she said nothing. Padre on one side, ranchero on the other, the three paced slowly up and down before the hacienda.

Don Patricio spoke in a low voice:

“The grant for Buena Esperanza, señorita, came directly from the king of Spain himself. It is necessary, as conditions stand now, for a new grant, a certification, to be issued. Don Estevan, Fra Juan tells me, has already requested this from the governor. He has sent a rough map with the request, as is required. But there is one thing we have seemingly neglected, which none of us knew about, and which we were not told. Before the governor issues the new grant, he must have a reply—an *informe*—from some local official. If possible, the official should be an *alcalde*. He should certify that the map is correct, the land vacant and claimed by no other ranchero. The meat inside the nut is this. Since there is no *alcalde*, don Ygnacio, who would look very nicely in hell, is the highest officer.”

"The grant should have arrived to-day, and would have, were it not for this newer ruling," the padre took up. "However, I am sure don Ygnacio has as yet received no order to investigate certification of the boundaries and conditions. If he does, he will surely do it gladly."

Hilarita looked at Fra Juan, but said nothing. Her face was drained of color; the eyes, after the trouble of the night, seemed suddenly lusterless.

"Some mission grants," don Patricio continued, "are called 'Fernandinos,' being issued by the college of San Fernando in Mexico. There is trouble about them also; there is even trouble about the mission land; the new government has a covetous eye, and the same sort of servants. Well, don Estevan's grant is from Fernando VII himself, and the similarity of names might well be confusing to illiterate officials, some of whom can not count to eleven, having only ten fingers." He waved his arms, very like a former proctor under whose teaching he had prospered little. "You know how don Ygnacio had usurped Fra Juan's control . . . well, they want to go a step further, and allow the Indians to chose their own rulers! It is no wonder that Marin and Quintin are out of hand. They have been telling their men——"

"Stick to the business before us," Fra Juan suggested firmly.

Don Patricio's face grew red. "The government has a regulation which says, 'the mission lands must be considered the property of the neophytes and the Mexican—not Spanish nor Irish, eh?—settlers! The

Indians will be lucky if they have a blade of grass left to them, if that scheme is inaugurated. The——”

“The business before us,” Fra Juan repeated.

“What you are both trying to tell me,” Hilarita said, more collected than either of the men, “is that certification has not come. You are worried. When it does arrive, it will still be necessary for don Ygnacio to pass upon it. Is that not the case, señores?”

Don Patricio, relieved that she understood, and that there was no need for more careful explanation, said grimly, “In a nutshell.”

“A difficult one to crack,” Hilarita told him.

“Easy, easy,” Fra Juan exclaimed. “Don Ygnacio is the dust beneath your feet——”

“He collects the dust to worship it—the only sense he has shown since he has come to San Rafael,” the Irishman agreed.

Fra Juan nodded. “We both think the same—and you know it is true, *niñita*. Merely get him to sign the *informe*——”

“And then, father?”

“Use him, as he would use you, for your own purpose!”

Don Patricio boomed, as they turned toward the hacienda again as they walked, and away from the hills toward San Rafael, “He thinks we Californians are cattle—that we have plenty of fat, but lack brains. Fool him, señorita, and I myself will tell the story of it from one end of the mission-chain to the other. We will laugh him out of the land, and the tale will pursue him wherever he goes.”

They walked silently, and then the girl said, "I am afraid it is too late to fool him now."

Both men cried, "Why?"

A shrill voice behind them snapped, "Perhaps because of parrots!"

None of the three had heard Cienega ride up; all had been terribly intent on the conversation, the problem facing Buena Esperanza, a possible solution. They turned now, to see don Ygnacio bowing over-deeply.

The padre was not the man to lie.

"So you know," he said.

"I know!" Cienega's voice shook with anger. "I always knew! But, father of naked savages who will soon be without a mission, remember this: my own father drove don Estevan out of Spain for his part in our little political movement, and, if that were not punishment enough, we were able to send his brother Andres del Valle to the colonies, a slave, even though Andres was supposed to wear our sign of the green feather. Ah, we played a deep game——"

"*You* were sucking on a bottle at the time," Fra Juan said, his level voice dangerous. "You know what you have been told—and nothing more. However, Fernando of Spain was not so angered that—when he came to his senses—he did not give del Valle a grant for the richest rancho in California——"

"Which *I* must confirm! Who is Fernando here?"

Hilarita, understanding only too well that the Cienegas had a part in her father's exile, her mother's death, said slowly, "I do not comprehend——"

Don Ygnacio's manner changed instantly.

"It is a matter concerning only men, dear one," he said. He did not add that he would say nothing about love to his father, when that sire wrote him angrily who the del Valles were, and how distasteful any alliance would be; not about love, but about land, the subtlest of revenge, and money. It would indeed convince his father. Cienega was glad that he had not been forced to wait for his father's angry explanatory missive; as it was, all would be accomplished before the letter was received.

Fra Juan, now, was fingering his beads; don Patrio, his face red as an Indian's at the sweat-house, shifted his weight from foot to foot.

The officer looked at Hilarita; what he saw made him say, mooningly, "Is not love enough?" A ringed hand went to the hilt of his sword: it was a persuasive attitude.

He stepped forward, but she eluded him. She was uncertain: did Cienega actually believe that all was arranged between them, or was he simulating, attempting to place her in a false position, from which only unpleasant explanation would extricate her?

What she had to say must be said: "If you did not love me, would you certify the grant for Buena Esperanza?" She started falteringly enough, but her voice became very clear at the end; she fairly sang the words "good hope," and yet it was, to Fra Juan, as if she no longer believed in any hope.

Don Ygnacio might have been startled, but he shook a playful finger at her.

"For your family, your father, I have little affec-

tion," he admitted. "However, I am marrying you, and for you, dear little 'Rita, I can forget much which has taken place merely by contemplating what is soon to happen. We need not talk of grants, of families, but only of one thing." He came a step closer. "Ah," he sighed, "give me love."

Fra Juan's lips were bleeding where his teeth gnawed at them. Don Patricio held his hands clenched together. Both men, in some uncanny way, understood that the affair had passed beyond them.

Hilarita answered nothing with her lips, but in her heart prayed for pity. She could hear, too clearly, don Estevan's feeble voice—"Fight for my land! Keep what belongs to the del Valles!" She realized—the very thing which was passing through Fra Juan's own mind—how hateful any union with a Cienega would be to her father. Hateful to him: he would not have allowed it. She supposed that he would prefer the loss of Buena Esperanza to such a price, such a marriage . . . and yet he said to keep what belonged to them. She had nothing to fight with, nothing to barter, save herself. Don Ygnacio played a game . . . she must play one also. The end was still not entirely clear. Perhaps it might not be as drear as seemed probable now.

She could not see the redwoods between Buena Esperanza and the ocean—the officer was between them and her—but she could remember, and did with tight throat, how she had first come up that dark hillside; how her father had said she was better, braver, than any son could have been. She had need of that

bravery now, of it, and cleverness. She would—she must—have the grant certified. What happened after was . . . not to be thought of now. She must fence for time. If don Estevan recovered, he would drive Cienega away, in one way or another; in the meantime, she would do what she could.

"Get me the grant," she said in a strange voice, "and then . . ."

Hilarita could say no more; there was no need.

"It will be yours for your wedding gift," don Ygnacio assured her.

As if for the first time the girl noticed the complete absence of anything save passion in his eyes—eyes deep and black, expressing something which his own men knew well, and other men's men even better.

For all her horrified aversion, her head did not droop. Retreat was no longer possible. Something welled up in her which made it impossible to say, "Give it to me now, as a proof of your love." She did not understand what kept her silent, although she thought, "I am trapped, although I might wriggle from it. I do not believe any del Valle ever wriggled. Don Estevan is going to be wild when he hears the price of Buena Esperanza . . . and yet it, also, is blood of his blood, as I am. He will not really lose me, and he will save the land." Retreat was no longer possible, but bravery was.

Cienega gave her no further time for chaotic, illogical thought. This, he knew, was California; the girl, for all her beauty, was unaccustomed to the formalities of courtship and courtliness. He came forward blithe-

ly, the sun glinting from the metallic threads worked into his uniform.

Fra Juan's sunken eyes burned deep in his head. His hand seemed to leap to his side, as if for the sword he had once worn, yet, when the Irishman tensed, the gaunt padre held him back with: "It is in God's hands." What an effort it cost him to say the simple words none but Fra Juan could ever know.

Don Patricio could not remain silent. He strode close to the *teniente*, snorted, and threw back his head. Then he deliberately turned away from him and faced Hilarita.

"I have always loved my peace," he shouted. But seeing none understood him, he snorted a second time, and began again: "You might make a shift, señorita, to become *my* wife, if you must have marriage—and never repent it, which is more than I can say in the present affair. I may be battered, but I am seasoned; I have had great experience, even if not in love. I——"

"You are a little late, don Patricio," Cienega retorted, speaking only to the Irishman's back. "You had your chance for many years, and said nothing. Now—you have only a caballero's part to act—and that is to wish us happiness."

Tardy, yes, but the Celt's loud words stopped Cienega's contemplated embrace, and don Patricio had hoped for little more, once his initial anger had cooled. Seeing how successful he had been, Callanan refused to give over without making the performance perfect—sending the officer, for the time, at least, away from

Buena Esperanza, with his lady unkissed and unembraced.

"You have counted without one thing," he said, not turning toward the *teniente*. His tone was as insulting as his failure to face the addressed officer.

"And what is that?" don Ygnacio asked, his eyes narrow.

"The wagging finger of fate, señor," the Irish don said readily, "and the conjunctions of the stars. My horoscope was taken at the college in Dublin with the utmost exactitude. Venus herself, for reasons of her own which neither you nor I can question, seems to have presided over my birth. Love, I was told, would come to me late, but when it did, I would be irresistible."

Cienega was uncertain whether or not don Patricio was laughing at him; he grew purple and red by turns. Hilarita, white to the lips, saw only a momentary release, yet was grateful for every passing instant. She took the little pause to say huskily, "I go to my father, señores," and half walked, half ran . . . and half stumbled . . . to the hacienda. Straight to her room she went, and told the story, in gasps, to the Lady of Sorrows from Spain.

"Why did you interfere?" don Ygnacio cried, when the white figure of Hilarita had disappeared into the warm darkness of the house. "I was about——"

"To violate every custom of decency," don Patricio snapped, whirling to face him. "Marry Hilarita, if her father permits it. It is all one to me. It is perfectly true, Venus or no Venus, that I do not pretend to love or

even approve of you, don Ygnacio, and the easiest way to end the matter might be for you and me to step over behind those trees, where the light is very good and will not be in either of our eyes, and see if I remember what I was taught about handling a sword. But for all that"—cognizant of Fra Juan's disapproval before it was put into words—"I should hate to think that for lack of a little decency a man should lose his life."

"You threaten me, Irishman?"

Fra Juan knew his hot-headed friend; he stared at him now, as if to impress the need for calmness. Suppose, the padre thought, suppose that don Patricio did kill Cienega. . . . What then? Investigation, lies (from every one of Cienega's *soldados*, who would testify that Callanan had killed the *teniente* by stabbing him in the back, although they were miles away in their quarters at San Rafael), trouble for all of the *rancheros*, for don Estevan and don Patricio in particular, and for himself and the Franciscans. He wondered if it might not be worth while. Hilarita . . . to be sacrificed to this green loathsome toad, this parrot . . .

He thought as he had before: "It is in other hands than mine. Who am I to protest? If it is His will that Cienega be killed"—his lips thinning to a white line—"He will cause it to happen."

"You threaten me, eh?" Cienega screamed. "This insult has gone far—but not as far as my blade will go!"

"Make yourself easy on that point," don Patricio

said gravely. "Your sword will fly twenty paces from you at my first pass. You may laugh at the thoroughness of my training with the blade, and the masters I have served under, but . . . you can not fight with planets."

Don Patricio believed that he had accomplished his purpose completely. He had, he felt positive, taken Cienega's mind away from love-making, and that was the main thing for the present. If the *teniente* decided to follow Hilarita into the house, don Patricio was prepared with new and keener arguments. Failing in these, he was willing to try sterner measures; he wondered how much sword-play he actually remembered.

The officer, also, had no desire for conflict. For one thing, the Irishman—a powerful fellow, *verdad!*—might run him through; for another, don Patricio's death (in the presence of Fra Juan) should the duel go a more favorable way, might be difficult to explain; for a third, Ygnacio Cienega had always prided himself upon his diplomacy.

He bowed slightly, then more deeply. "We are all men here," he said. "Will it make you more happy if I tell you that I have received don Estevan's formal consent? That I came to-day to measure señorita Hilarita's foot for the satin bridal slippers?"

"No."

"I can imagine how you feel, señor . . . but there are a million thwarted lovers in the world, and, let me tell you, when a girl has her mind up to get a man, there is nothing she will stop at."

"No?"

"I am glad you take it so sensibly," don Ygnacio said aloud. To himself he added, "The truth with the lies." He glanced about for a *cholo* to place his foot in the stirrup, but, seeing none, was forced to mount unaided. "Yes, we are all men here," he said blithely; "we have too much sense to fight about nothing. . . . Is that not true, don Patricio?"

The Irishman stared at him.

He said, a third time, "No," and turned away.

When the officer was clattering across the beaten clay, making as much noise as possible and glancing toward where he hoped Hilarita was watching from her window, Fra Juan said, in the unsteady dry voice of exhaustion, "You did it better than I might have. For a time I was afraid that you two would——"

"There was nothing to be afraid of. For me, there will never be. Nor for Hilarita . . . to-day." The Irish ranchero looked at Fra Juan intently. "You are a good man, father, but it is going to take more than even your prayers to keep that fellow out of hell."

"When it seemed inevitable that you were about to fight . . . I was not praying . . . for him."

So much of confession was in the padre's statement, and so much troubled confusion in his face, that don Patricio at first did not speak; what he said at last was, "I did not think you did."

XVII

IN THE following days Hilarita saw little of Ygnacio Cienega, and could have wished it less. It took all of her ingenuity to keep the officer from being alone with her; without don Silencio, it would have been impossible. Like a grizzled dog, the silent man followed her; he was blind to gestures to leave her (from any one) and deaf to commands to begone, when don Ygnacio was about.

De la Torre came regularly to Buena Esperanza. By some miracle the young ranchero had failed to hear of the new trouble. Fra Juan did not tell him, nor did don Patricio, and for once the matter was unknown to the servants. Hilarita did not know how to tell him of it, since she loved him; dared not tell him, since she loved him so greatly. She was, now, living in daily fear—of Cienega, of marriage, of Ricardo, of everything.

Certification of the grant had not arrived. It appeared, with the lapse of time, that it would never come . . . save as a wedding-gift in the hands of don Ygnacio. To the girl the formal parchment became a horrible thing; she would wake, to see it (for a moment) where the figure of the Virgin stood, and, at that instant, it seemed as if she were not alone in her bed; until she was wide awake, the last haze of

sleep vanished, she would twist to the very edge of the mattress in agony.

The tallow had been delivered to Fra Juan (and an Indian *cholo* riding on the ox-cart shot on the way to the mission); the tension at San Rafael Arcangel had lessened little, since the government (through Cienega) made increased demands for supplies. The rancheros had not sufficient surplus to sell to the Russians at Bodega, even had they dared to send *carretas* through the district peopled by the Caynameros, who were helping the Tah-mahs now in stealing cattle and harassing the mission.

Don Estevan lingered half-way, more or less, between reason and unreason. One day he would snarl at all visitors, cut their words from their mouths, attempt to strike at them; the next he would act like a conspirator and never open his mouth; the third he would be himself, eager for news of the rancho, given to boasting of the way Hilarita was managing his affairs.

"You are satisfied with me?" the girl asked him, at such a time.

"No son could be better, or do better," was don Estevan's answer. "Let me tell you, Hilarita, life would not be worth the living if we did not possess Buena Esperanza . . . the good hope . . . the hope for happiness . . ."

"And"—timidly, her heart throbbing to choke her—"you would have me do anything to retain it?"

If only he would say, "Not *anything*; only *anything* within reason!"

Don Estevan's troubled brain pondered over his daughter's question. He did not observe her tense, worried eyes; he did not ask, "What do you mean?" but, instead, as if there were some sort of thread from brain to brain, conjured up the vision of Ygnacio Cienega . . . ah, but such a thing was impossible! The thread snapped, just before the idea of impossibility came. Don Estevan thought next of Ricardo . . . and of grandchildren pattering about in the hacienda. He leaned from his bed and pinched Hilarita's cheek. "Anything," he said grandly. "You should not worry so, *niñita*; the rancho runs itself, eh? And we will have the grant in all its glory soon. It comes any day now"—don Estevan had lost track of time—"and then . . . well, I suppose I will be forced to spend much money on the wedding . . . but I do not mind. It will make me happy to think that Buena Esperanza will shelter del Valle blood even after I am gone. Very happy. You are a good daughter."

She bowed her head. How truly she bowed it don Estevan could not know.

"I can not fight as men do, with a sword," she said, "but I am doing what little I can."

He answered wearily, "What is all this talk of swords? I have seen too much of that already! Keep me that land of mine and I am satisfied."

Constant wearing away of the stone . . . Hilarita's vision of Don Estevan's anger when he learned the price to be paid no longer burned so bright in her mind. She had agreed—what other way was there, no matter what her father's distaste might be.

Hilarita took his hand—singularly like that of a man in full strength, thanks to the exercise Fra Juan insisted the ranchero must take, if no more than a walk from bed to door and back again—and at once saw that don Estevan was about to fall into one of his curious deep sleeps.

“Too many swords,” the ranchero said, as if to himself. “Ah, well, we made it hot for old Cienega and his plotters. They wore green feathers, those men. Andres was one of them. At least I thought he was.” He twisted his arm under his head, staring at the rafters. “How fast we were forced to flee Spain! Hilarita big with the son we hoped for . . . and dead before we were on shipboard!”

Hilarita sat motionless beside the bed, her eyes wide.

“We were loyal, we del Valles and Estradas and Morenes. . . . Ah, yes, but none understood what reforms we wanted, nor how much good they would have done both caballeros and peasants. . . .

“Andres! Andres! I would recall the words of poison I spat at you! I thought that you told of the del Valles’ part in the business, that you were a traitor. . . . How long ago that all was! Andres! If I could only hear your voice . . . the last man, besides me, of the line. . . . Andres! Where are you, brother?”

Don Silencio slipped noiselessly into the room. He smiled at Hilarita, stepped to the far side of the bed, and bent over don Estevan. The *hacendado* ceased crying out. His fingers, his entire great body, relaxed, and sudden sleep engulfed him.

Hilarita gazed at don Silencio steadily, almost in

fear. Too much had happened, was happening, and was presaged, for her to think clearly. Nevertheless, she said nervously, "He called . . . and . . ."

The silent man watched her, a little smile on his face moving his lips almost as if in speech.

"And you came," Hilarita finished slowly. "Was it because you heard your name?"

Don Silencio shook his head.

"You were merely—following me?"

The grave old Spaniard made neither motion of assent nor disagreement.

Hilarita demanded swiftly, "Who are you? Where do you come from?"

The man waved a hand; he might have meant from any of the four seas.

"From . . . a ship?"

He smiled, shrugged, spread out his hands as if hopelessly.

The girl said sharply, "If you were Andres del Valle, my father would have known you. It has been many years since my father saw his brother, but a brother would always know another. Is that not true, don Silencio?"

He nodded vigorously.

Her next words, delivered swiftly, did not unsettle him as she hoped they might: "*You* knew my father," she shot out. He was not, she saw, to be trapped, if he were playing a part. Somehow, she was drawn to the silent man, and by more than gratitude. She wondered what his answer would be to the greatest question, the greatest fear, always present in her

thoughts. Why not ask him? Who else—save possibly Fra Juan, who had already seemingly failed her—might she speak with?

"Don Silencio," she said slowly, "you know what is happening here. Ah, do not shake your head—you know. I am to marry don Ygnacio. There is no other way out. But is it . . . worth while?" Even while he was shaking his head from side to side, she continued, "My father has had sorrow enough in his life. I may not be his son, but I can keep Buena Esperanza for him." What she should have said, she realized, was nearer the truth; that the surrender of her body would keep Buena Esperanza. She was about to go on, but the expression on don Silencio's face stopped her.

It ran the gamut of every emotion from rage to impotence, and ended blank. Once, the girl thought, his mouth opened, although he said no word. At the very end he smiled; Hilarita had never seen such a smile before. It was as if he said, "You need not worry about that Cienega!"

She said hurriedly, her breath coming quickly, marking each of don Estevan's with three, "You are not to hurt the officer! It will only make everything worse. I forbid it, don Silencio! But . . . when he comes to visit me . . . before we are . . . before I am . . . before I must . . . never leave me, don Silencio! Ah, never leave me!"

The grim nameless man reached across the bed (don Estevan never stirring) and took her hand. He raised it to his lips and kissed it.

Her days now she spent in a fury of work. Even

in the siesta-hours she was at some task; she did not sleep until utter exhaustion sucked the last thought from her head. But . . . oh, terrible! . . . she could not control her dreams. Such tangled things, woven and interwoven; happiness cut off at the moment of experience, sorrow drawn out and out to waken her at last in terror.

She was thinner now, and a trace of bitter savagery left its mark in her eyes. Don Ygnacio, who liked plump women, chided her about eating too little, although he was pleased by it: a sign that she loved him, no?

She saw to the tanning of hides and the making of boots and shoes for the men. Looms clattered and spinning-wheels whirled as the women, under her direction, carded, spun and wove the wool from the Buena Esperanza sheep. Like a man she roamed the hills on horse, don Silencio ever behind her, and the *apartadores*, armed heavily, watching her progress, counting cattle and selecting wild horses for new *caponeras*.

She started the erection of a new storehouse—for lack of other employment, standing over the Indians as they ground the lumps of clay in the *arastras*, as they trod it with their bare feet and mixed it with wild hay from the fields. So they had made the adobe bricks for Buena Esperanza itself years ago—a hacienda made from the earth, and now fruitful because of that same earth. Fruitful for what reason? To feed a . . . a brood of Cienegas? Her hands pressed tightly against her breasts as she thought, "If only

poison can issue from me, and kill them one after another!"

It was hard to be a woman!

Sometimes escorted only by don Silencio, sometimes with a Ricardo as silent as the speechless man, she rode in the redwood forests, and watched her men hew down a great tree, from which crossbeams and joists and rafters were shaped by hand.

Once the slower work of construction began, she soon lost interest. Never did she tell the servants where she intended spending the hours; thus she was able to elude don Ygnacio's amorously intended visits. These, she knew, could not be avoided for ever; she was fearful that the passion in the *teniente*, bottled, would break and carry her at last in its flow . . . unthinkable!

Doña Luisa said (not thinking of Cienega, but of her own husband) that one learned enough of love after marriage. As if people were like the mares of the herd!

Hilarita blamed no one. Others had seen sorrow. She, also, would see it, and learn, perhaps, to become as immobile as the Lady's figure in her bedroom.

The Indians were, ominous sign, quiet with all the chopping and hammering at the rancho. The usual throng of starved savages when a rancho bullock was slaughtered were seen no more: the Tah-mahs fed bloodily on the hills, taking their beef where they hungered.

Ominous sign also, the archangels—Rafael, Miguel and Gabriel—maintained their self-appointed nightly vigil about the hacienda.

Each rancho continued in the daily duties, but the joyous easy-going *hacendados* had given over fiestas, barbecues, racing, even dancing. There had not been a bull-fight for months. When the rancheros rode into San Rafael Arcangel they were attended by armed herders. The long lazy hours, when women took their naps, and men smoked, chatted and dozed, were, for the time, put to a discussion of the latest gossip about the savages.

Hilarita realized also, from the actions of the visiting rancheros, that don Ygnacio had not been silent; more, that he had said the wedding would soon take place. Had she not been positive of this, the last visit of Fra Juan gave her proof on top of proof.

The gaunt priest had merely said, "Is there no other way, my daughter? What would your father think of such a price?"

And she had replied, "What other way is there?"

"I am to get my blood-money from it," the padre had told her. "The month of the wedding, the mission need pay nothing to the government. Generous! We have nothing left to pay, save what the sons of the church give us. If only the *Indios* were really making attacks, one of their arrows might . . ."

She had not protested. Instead, wearily, she said, "Rafael was always a good man with his bow, and I think he still practises with it. . . . Ah, but that would be of no use. I could never forget it."

It was then that Ricardo had ridden up. Before he was actually at the hacienda, Fra Juan asked, with strange timidity: "Have you told him?"

"I can not!"

"Does he know?"

"He must know. Every one else does. He says so little . . ."

Fra Juan recognized what she intended saying.

"Pray for me, father," the girl whispered. "I will tell him now, while you are here."

Her low voice was steady, for all that her heart was doing double-knocks against the wall of her breast. She thought as much of the hurt she must deal de la Torre as her own sorrow.

XVIII

FROM the patio of Buena Esperanza one could see the rounded hills behind the distant invisible mission. The patio itself was flooded with sunshine and a-drone with golden-winged bees. Overhanging tiles cast grateful shade.

Red and yellow Castilian roses, yellow jasmine from Aragon, giant ferns from the California canyons, banked against the plastered walls. About a fountain were plants brought from San Blas in Mexico—many-hued lilies, over which yellow-and-silver butterflies hovered. In a corner a sharp-thorned cactus reared a graceful spiny head, terminating in a stiff crimson-flowered stalk.

Yellows and reds; above them, the clear blue of the sky.

Birds had built their nests in the climbing roses; they chattered at Hilarita's white kitten.

The bees droned monotonously, sweetly. . . . A place made for love; the setting for love and the characters as well.

Hilarita had just said, "Then . . . you know, Ricardo?"

And the man had answered, "I know."

"You . . . you do not . . . blame me?"

Fra Juan had said sternly, "You are without blame!"

"Without blame," de la Torre repeated now. "I

sometimes wish you were . . . less brave. If you were less courageous, you would give up Buena Esperanza—but—you are a del Valle, and it is a del Valle that I love.” He said to the padre, “Will it be a sin to love a woman who is married?”

Fra Juan looked at him long before replying.

“Nothing pure is ever sinful, my son,” he said at last.

“I understand,” Ricardo said. “It was not easy, Hilarita . . . when I first heard—before I knew *why*—I wanted to do—many foolish things. That is over now. I am . . . no, I am not glad you told me, for I realize how hard the telling was. But now you are sure I know; perhaps it will help you.” In exactly the same voice he added, “We . . . we will forget?”

Swiftly, “I can never forget!”

Fra Juan turned away as de la Torre took her hand.

“No,” Ricardo said, exactly as he had thought and known before; “we will never forget.”

A thousand words tried to force themselves out of his inarticulate mouth. Surely don Estevan did not want his daughter married to a hated Cienega; the rancho was not worth the price! Could the certification of the grant be obtained in no other way? Was don Estevan, in his present condition, any judge of anything?

De la Torre, inexpressive, wanted action . . . but what action?

His own father, don José, had explained that the matter was for the del Valles to decide. Doña Luisa (hearing the news) had first said that if Hilarita wanted a blue-jay for a husband, let her have him—

and, when Ricardo was silent, drove him out of del Monte with the demand that he straighten the tangle, marry the dear girl and thus settle everything. How? Ricardo had managed the one word. How? Doña Luisa, for all her screaming, had not said. Nor, later, could she say.

Ricardo's throat, in the pleasant patio, was dry, as if his chilled body had sucked the moisture from it.

Fra Juan said slowly, "Yes, Ricardo, Ygnacio Cienega would look pretty spitted. However, all that would do is to bring the wrath of the high officials down on us all, and especially on the del Valles. Our rulers——"

"Are they not fair men?" Ricardo demanded. "Will they uphold this action of Cienega?"

"They will do more, since they made the law themselves," the padre answered.

Hilarita's hand lay lax in her lover's.

"How long has it been since I sat on my horse, looking over the hills, and thinking that this was a land of *men*," de la Torre said bitterly. "Cattle—horses—sheep—broad leagues of land—a glorious people—I can not explain how I felt. As if it were the promised land, Fra Juan. But now . . . it is all changed."

"It is the same," the brown-robed Franciscan said sorrowfully. "You have altered, and not the land, Ricardo. It is glorious, and we make of it the glory of God." Even to the padre, this sounded futile. He cast about for some shred of consolation, and believed he found it: "Never forget this, my son; you still have something!"

De la Torre did not even ask what the padre meant, because he did not care. He was seeing the end of hope—hope which was so near to him, and yet so very far away.

"Something none can ever take away from you," Fra Juan repeated, his eyes somber.

Hilarita veiled her eyes, but Ricardo said harshly, thinking of other things, "What is that?"

The Franciscan paused, his eyes, unseeing, on the silvery flight of a butterfly. Not until the wings flickered shut, and the insect became invisible against a shining yellow rose, did the padre say, "You have loved."

Somehow, Hilarita was in Ricardo's arms; his lips touched a cheek wet with tears. Fra Juan was clicking at his beads.

"I can not, I can not," the girl sobbed, broken at last. "Oh, Ricardito . . ."

And from the house they heard, "My land . . . my hills . . . made from the wilderness . . . the land of the del Valles . . . blood of my blood . . . Hilarita! Hilarita! *Andres!*"

Man and woman stood with hands on each other's shoulders.

"We will never forget," Ricardo said hoarsely.

He never would, nor she. In that moment they were already storing for memory the perfume of the roses, the humming of the bees, the tiny noise as the padre clicked his beads; no sky would ever again be so blue, nor any heaven as distant.

"Come to my marriage," Hilarita whispered. "I

will be thinking of you! I will be loving you . . . marrying none but you. You are to have what don Ygnacio may never possess. Ricardo of my heart, what you will see at the altar will only be my shadow—an effigy—a doll in a wedding-garment——”

Her arms went fiercely about his neck, and, as Fra Juan prayed, they kissed.

Don Estevan's voice had stilled; don Silencio walked rapidly from the house and into the patio. He gestured to Fra Juan (as if he did not see the lovers); first his hands went to his shoulders, and his fingers became the twisted gold threads drooping from epaulets; then he drew an imaginary sword; lastly, he flapped his arms as if they were wings.

The padre said hastily, “Go into the house, Hilarita. And you had better start for del Monte, Ricardo. Don Ygnacio is coming, and——”

“I have a word or two to tell him,” de la Torre interrupted.

Fra Juan nodded. “Tell him, if you feel you must,” he agreed. “Only be careful.”

The young ranchero thought, “There has been too much care,” but said nothing.

Despite the Franciscan's warning, Hilarita remained in the patio. Don Ygnacio came directly to her, raised her hand and kissed it very gracefully. De la Torre stood stock-still.

“A little conference, eh?” Cienega asked. “I am glad you are here, padre. I have reported to the presidio that the presence of soldiers at San Rafael Arcangel is no longer necessary, which is a good thing, for they are

needed elsewhere. My men are to leave very shortly; I may keep one or two to keep my boots in order. The Indians have never learned to do it correctly. Well, you will be glad they are gone, I suppose. Only, do not become too jubilant—you will not lose me so fast. I am sending my resignation to Monterey. You know why?"

If Fra Juan knew his knowledge was not apparent—nor any other thought. His gaunt face moved no muscle.

"It pains me to see my loved one, my little Hilarita, forced to direct a rancho, and so I will soon relieve her of such unpleasant duties. Now . . . as to the date of the wedding. Make it soon, father. I am not a patient man. No man would be patient, with señorita Hilarita waiting to be his bride. Is that not true, don Ricardo?"

"Very true, don Ygnacio."

"I knew you would agree." He smiled contentedly. "I had heard that once my dear one and yourself were youthfully inclined to childish affection. . . . Well, times change, don Ricardo."

"They change."

"Yes, yes. And we will soon be neighbors. It will be a relief, let me tell you, to be a simple *hacendado*, after my years in the army. One must do one's duty, naturally, but one must also . . ."

De la Torre said, "Think of the future?"

Since he had so nicely voiced what don Ygnacio had left unsaid, the *teniente* raised his hand deprecatingly.

"That is not it at all, don Ricardo!" Glancing at

Hilarita, whose eyes were on the flags on the patio, he added, "Of course, in a way, I thought of the future. Great as an army career is, can you compare it with becoming the husband of a lovely woman? I am as eager about it as any boy. I never was so anxious"—bowing to the silent girl—"for any event in my life."

"I was thinking of that," Ricardo said shortly.

"*Cómo que quien piensa en eso?*" the officer snapped. "What do you mean by saying 'who is thinking of that?'"

Ricardo, amazed at the other's vehemence, said steadily enough, "That is not exactly what I said, don Ygnacio. But, nevertheless . . . why the need for haste?"

De la Torre had no intention of startling Cienega; startle him he undoubtedly had.

"Why do you ask?" the *teniente* cried. He had given over posturing; he thrust his face toward de la Torre with the question.

Why? Ricardo himself wondered. Probably no other reason than to postpone Hilarita's marriage, unhappiness, as long as possible. Now, suddenly, his heart began to pound furiously. He knew that Fra Juan, also, was nervous and excited; the padre's fingers were working at the edge of his coarse brown robe.

"You should know why I ask," de la Torre said. He hoped that Cienega did, for he himself did not. He spoke negligently, but never took his eyes from the officer's.

There was a pause, so long that Hilarita, trying to stand motionless, swayed a little back and forth. a

motion no more perceptible than the tremulous shiver of an opened rose petal against the supporting stem and near-by leaf. Fra Juan's hands were still now, but clutched the fabric of his habit tightly.

De la Torre listened carefully when Cienega began to talk: "Merely because . . . merely because . . ."

The *teniente* was at bay, Ricardo could see him gather his wits, to say at last, "You know how it is with hot-blooded men like ourselves, don Ricardo! If we are not anxious about our marriages—my marriage—what sort of men would we—I—be?" He had never included Ricardo in so complimentary a manner before. "You understand? Hilarita's image is before me day and night"—and his before her!—"and if she were a beggar's daughter I would still be just as eager. If I am forced to wait, it will drive me wild. You understand, caballero?"

Understand? Less and less. The reference to beggars bothered de la Torre. Did Cienega mean that Hilarita might become a beggar, or was he justifying his love and his haste?

Cienega faced Fra Juan before de la Torre had anything clear. To the padre he said, "Shall we say . . . within the week, father?"

Fra Juan tried to fence. "Impossible, don Ygnacio," he protested. "There are numerous saint's days to consider. The rancheros must all be notified. A fiesta must be arranged. A week is hardly time enough——"

"A week. Otherwise, as a final act before I resign, it will be found necessary to double-tax the mission."

Cienega was sure of himself now. He had sur-

mounted what might have been an obstacle, and intended to allow no delay now.

A hand pressed to her breast, Hilarita had been unable to follow the words which had aroused padre and ranchero. Before either could continue the argument—— “Within the week,” she promised in a cold small voice. The play had got away from her; she acted a part in a tragedy of no man’s making.

Don Ygnacio bowed triumphantly. She loved him, *verdad*; she would be readily ruled. More, she would thank him for the spur! Any doubts he had about her first—to him—admission of love had vanished: he was that sort of man.

“Come, *niñita*,” he said to her. “The afternoon is not hot. Let us ride together, and, if you in your heart desire a fiesta, I am not the man to forbid it.”

She followed him—cold, dutiful, beaten down. Don Silencio calmly strode behind the vanishing pair, the only one of the five who seemed entirely himself. What he thought of it his silent lips concealed.

“You see how it is,” de la Torre said unsteadily, when he and the padre were alone. “And yet——”

“He seemed anxious——”

“He *was* anxious!”

“Why?”

De la Torre stared at the bees in the blossoms.

“I am going to find out,” he said.

“You can do no good and much harm,” Fra Juan muttered. “The Mexican officials hate the true Californians. They envy you your land, your happiness, your cattle, your wealth. They know nothing of the

fight to reach this paradise. Do not go. You will only make things worse, for Hilarita, for don Estevan, for your own family. I have spent many nights on my knees, but I have received no answer. If it would have done any good—any good at all—I would have gone to Monterey myself and pleaded. But the officials love the padres even less than they love the Californians . . .

“Stay, Ricardo.”

“Would you so advise if you were not a priest?”

The Franciscan did not answer directly.

“I have seen much of violence, of hatred. It has been difficult for me to restrain my sinful hands from throttling Cienega . . . I admit it. I try to fix my mind on peace and on the gentle Virgin . . . but”—timidly—“*you* are not a priest, Ricardo, and while I tell you what I think wisest, yet . . .”

“No, I am not a priest,” de la Torre half shouted, “and I have stood by silently long enough! I have seen clearly that evil would come from killing Cienega. . . . Did you see how Hilarita followed him, as if she already bore her cross?” His cheeks were hot, but he felt that he was very cold within. “Listen, father: here is how it stands.

“The land is don Estevan’s. The King of Spain himself granted it to him, and he made it worth something by his thought and labor and direction. What is this certification of which there has been so much talk? I am sick of words! It is time I said something myself. . . . Am I a man, or a figure of sawdust? Is it certification of whether this Cienega likes Don Estevan’s politics . . . or his daughter?”

Fra Juan tried to calm him.

"It means——"

"By the blood on the cross, it means only that the boundaries are attested to as correct, that the original grant was rightfully and legally given! Cienega has not the power nor right to withhold his signature and his approval."

"The right, no; the power, yes. At all events, he has done both."

"We will see what his superiors at Monterey have to say about it."

Fra Juan said unhappily, "This is nothing new. You—we all—knew these facts before."

"True . . . not new. But a man can do no less than try. We were men enough to set foot in this land when it was a wilderness—are we not men enough to keep snakes from wiping out our footprints with their crawling bodies? If these Mexicans at Monterey are of the same stamp as Cienega, nothing can be done. I know what I know, however, and they are going to hear it from me, whether they like the sound of it or not. I——"

"Careful, careful. You are no diplomat . . . and you seem to have found your tongue——"

"Neither diplomat nor fool, my father. Slow of wit, yes. But I tell you that Cienega was anxious. He was almost afraid. You marked it also, without any word from me. What troubles him; what is the need for haste? Perhaps I may find out at Monterey if there is an answer to this riddle."

Fra Juan saw peril piled upon peril.

"He is a passionate man, Ricardo, and Hilarita is very lovely——"

"More than that sort of passion moved him. I should have gone to Monterey days ago, but my mother and don José argued against it; you yourself do not believe it will do good——"

"It might mean something," Fra Juan admitted, trying to avoid showing the younger man that he himself was catching fire from the very vehemence. "Only be careful; do nothing to injure your own people——"

"It would hurt them more to have their own son a coward!"

The ranchero looked very young; Fra Juan's throat throbbed painfully merely from watching him. Well—why not? A last cast of the dice . . . a cast which might mean a lost rancho . . . or a won bride. Worth the gamble? A dozen years ago Fra Juan never would have hesitated himself. He said slowly, "If your mind is made up . . . I will give you all the time I can. Let them tax me as they will, there will be no marriage until you return, if it is in my power to prevent it. I can not promise what is only in God's hands, but I intend doing my best. Can Cienega force me to perform the ceremony? He can not. Thirty years ago I would have . . . No matter."

De la Torre bent his head for the padre's blessing.

From the house came the astonishingly robust voice of Don Estevan:

"Hilarita! Where are you, baby? Why am I lying here with so much to be done? Why . . . why . . ."

Fra Juan looked up almost happily, but the smile

was swiftly erased as the great voice dimmed, and the sick man began to wail, "Hilarita . . . Hilaria . . . Where are you, dear wife? . . . Why am I . . . Andres . . ."

Shivering, and unable to control it, the padre raised his eyes to the bright sky. The hum of the bees in the roses grew until the sound roared louder than the surf in his ears.

Scarcely louder than the whirring wings, don Estevan whimpered feebly, "Why am I alone?"

His lips a grim white line, de la Torre waited for Fra Juan's final word of benediction.

"Go with God," the padre said. "There remains nothing else."

He stood watching until Ricardo had strode out of the sunny rose-filled patio, and then, in anguish, went to his knees.

XIX

DE LA TORRE rode swiftly south and east. He did not take the trail toward the mission, but that which circled the base of the mountain near the bay, sacred to the Tah-mah Indians, and which led to rancho corte de madera del Presidio, where he could be carried across the bay of San Francisco in a *balsa* paddled by don Arturo's men. He left it with Fra Juan to make what explanation was necessary to his father and mother. They would, he knew, ride with him in thought. Doña Luisa, for all her shrill words, was for once whole-heartedly angry; the very mention of Cienega's name set her to buzzing like a horde of disturbed hornets.

Ricardo had taken one of don Estevan's horses rather than his own tired animal, and the black matched his own mood by taking the rise out of Buena Esperanza at high speed.

Supplies de la Torre did not need, nor did he think of them. He could eat at any rancho he passed through; the only difficulty would be in riding away swiftly again, since the *hacendados* would urge and expect him to stop, to gossip and to rest. New and fresh horses, the finest each rancho afforded, would always be furnished him, and on the return journey he would find the original animals, or better ones, waiting

for the saddle. What were horses to men who counted them only in *caponeras* of twenty-five?

As Hilarita had become both thin and mature, so de la Torre had changed with the months. Silent always, he had added to his soberness a grim sort of graveness; his face was something now to make the easy-going Californians stop and ponder. It was too soon for him to be bitter. If he had any serious fault, it was the ability to see the other person's side of an argument . . .

At a high point along the trail he paused and turned in his saddle. Beyond Buena Esperanza, he could see a single column of smoke, thin, high, probably that of his own rancho of *punte del Monte*. They must be preparing the evening meal. Don José would be waiting, in a fresh gay jacket, for the *cholo* to bring wine cooled in the pool; doña Luisa would be bustling about in soft snow-white attire . . .

Thinking of the commonplace steadied him. Outwardly, he was the same as ever, collected, serious; in his head, however, he was revolving a hundred things which ran together into a complicated and tangled problem.

Long shadows were already falling across the floors of the valleys below. It was clear, although a bank of summer fog blanketed the far Pacific with gray velvet. De la Torre could see little figures at the doorway of Buena Esperanza.

How peaceful the valleys were! What a land . . . what a land for one's . . . children. He partly understood how don Estevan must feel about the

rancho, although he still believed that the *hacendado's* words had been partly spoken in fever. He did not condemn don Estevan, nor question Hilarita's obedience. Duty was duty, and more than a virtue. It came to him now that many things, and not the least of them children, depended entirely upon the success of this last desperate venture.

He had no pity for himself. If he lost Hilarita, it was . . . inevitable. So Fra Juan believed. But did Hilarita herself think the same? Was that the meaning to give her bowed head, her following of don Ygnacio? Inevitable . . . Did he believe it himself? Was there any such word?

The horse swayed a little, awaiting de la Torre's pressure against his flanks.

The deadly ability of placing himself in another's position was with him now. His problem, after Hilarita's marriage, would be to remain constant—no problem that; her own was to be everlastingly faithful in mind, while lying in Cienega's arms.

"It is too much to ask of any one," he muttered.

Hilarita would be riding with the *teniente* now; riding close to him (if he had his way) with his eager lips at her unwilling ear. Ricardo tried to follow with his eyes the trail they had probably taken. His brows drew together. A tiny white figurine. That would be Hilarita. Beside her, something which flashed regally in the sun. Don Ygnacio. And behind them the bulkier mass which could be only don Silencio.

The three were moving slowly along the trail. By a lone redwood, last of a brave group, the figures

stopped. Like tiny chessmen moved by a master hand. They were looking down, Ricardo supposed, over the abrupt chasm which ended in a lovely fern-bordered stream.

White, and flashing color, seemed very close together. . . .

De la Torre pulled his eyes away. Time! That was the thing! He must ride, and ride fast. Although Fra Juan would fight for this same time, he himself must not delay nor be delayed; either would be disaster. Minutes had meaning; an hour might change the lives of a dozen people.

He thought sharply, "She is with Cienega, but is that new? Yet the business has changed—not the fact that she is with him, that he expects to have her and she sees no loophole, but that at last I am trying to do something to prevent it. *Vaya . . . que me largo . . .* and I have reason to suppose I may succeed. I must at least think I will . . . I think too much, anyhow. . . . It is time I tried to do something. Fra Juan did not chide me, but if he had not been a Franciscan, would he have stood by and allowed all I allowed? No . . . he would have tried, at least . . ."

Faster and faster the black drove ahead now, as if he realized the desire for action in his rider's mind. When the trail began slowly to descend, the horse leaped forward at increasing and dangerous speed. Ricardo did not check him.

De la Torre fought down the deadly satisfaction that haste brings; he put his mind away from the thought of Hilarita and Cienega. That could be stopped later.

The one thing was the grant. All else would, he believed, follow.

Through manzanita the trail led, and the sharp twigs of the shrub tore at de la Torre, as if they were servants of the *teniente* and wanted to hold him back. The black did not slacken his pace. Down the inclines he plunged, taking the rises, each lower than the last, with pounding hoofs . . . down . . . up . . . down . . . up . . .

Buena Esperanza was out of sight now.

How far had he gone? De la Torre left the plans he was making, and looked about for landmarks, never staying the furious striding of the horse.

They were, he saw, near the eastern base of the sacred mountain. Three more miles to don Arturo's and the bay? Four, perhaps?

As he figured the distance, he knew that the land was growing darker, the sky purple with the coming night; the great mountain was black.

De la Torre hoped that don Arturo, at corte de madera, would not insist that he stay the night, but would have him ferried across the broad bay at once. He decided to consent to no delay—an easier thing to accomplish with the Englishman than it would have been with a Spanish Californian.

No, it could not be more than three miles; de la Torre had sighted the bare patch of reddish rock on the side of the double-coned mountain of the Tah-mahs.

Only reddish rock? Or, in the middle of the open space, a fire, red also, flaring high, curiously blended into the sienna-iron color of the stones. A fire of dry

wood, never a signal, burning without smoke. From nowhere else save this point along the trail could the blaze have been discovered.

He did not slacken pace as he watched.

Around the fire, seen more clearly as he approached, he saw that which sent involuntary chills up his spine—the leaping figures of the savage Tah-mahs.

Instinctively, now, he reined the black.

A thin wail of sound (withheld before by the racing horse) lifted to his ears. The Tah-mahs were chanting a hymn to the toad-woman who hated all Spaniards, and to *o-wah-to*, the fire lizard, who was her husband . . . who killed white men to earn her horrible pleasure. Only a word or two reached him, but they were enough to tell him the whole.

The flames lighted the lower drooping branches of the redwoods above the dancing-place, making them bloom with fierce, strange, crimson blossoms. The naked savages danced more furiously, dark goblins gathered about a hellish demon-fire. Bits of ebony carved from the rock of a black underworld, spotted blood-bright by the fire's gleam.

Faster and faster they danced. Faster . . .

De la Torre, shocked cold, could see some of the Tah-mahs, like exhausted imps, fall in a frenzy beside the glare, while their fellows leaped over them wildly. He was not close enough to smell the stench of singeing flesh, but he knew it was there.

The horse trembled, although his rider never moved.

The Californian knew that it had been many years since the Tah-mahs had done this dance of death. The

treatment and insolence the savages were according Fra Juan and the mission, their absence from San Rafael Arcangel save when they raided the Franciscan cattle, don Ygnacio's arrogance and cruelty toward them (returnable in kind), the surliness of the newer servants at the ranchos, the murder of the chained sawyers, chief Marin's smoke signals, all flared up now with the fire to confuse and startle de la Torre.

He glanced back once again toward hidden Buena Esperanza.

Then, desperately, he urged the horse down the trail which led to the bay-shore hacienda of corte de madera del Presidio.

XX

THE situation, to Ygnacio Cienega, appeared fairly delicate. Double wages—Hilarita and Buena Esperanza—were already as good as in his pocket. Just one little twist from his accustomed fingers, and he would have both secure.

De la Torre's question had troubled him, and, in a small measure, still did. What had the young fool meant by it? After all, what difference, since Hilarita would marry him within the week. Seven days in a week . . . Why not make it three, or, better, to-morrow?

They had been riding along the trail; at the single redwood, where de la Torre had seen them, don Ygnacio stopped his horse. There was a little broad place where man and girl paused. Don Silencio was forced to remain a good twenty feet in the rear, unless the silent man proposed to have his horse stand on an uncomfortable incline in the path. Don Ygnacio had halted his horse squarely across the narrower part of the way.

The *teniente's* proposals were simple.

First, he loved her. Secondly, she loved him, although this was hardly important—which last he did not say. Thirdly, a week was not a great space of time, considering the age of the world, but when all of their

mutual love had to be crowded into one brief and insufficient lifetime, a week made a difference, no? Well, let them be married at once. This was not Spain—this was California, or, if you would be more exact, Mexico. Formalities could be dispensed with, this once. Excitement at the rancho might disturb poor don Estevan. Why not slip away to San Rafael Arcangel and have Fra Juan make them man and wife? It could be done (a snap of the fingers blithely) as easy as that. He, Ygnacio Cienega, who worshiped her, would see to it.

Hilarita, patient, cold, kept her tired eyes on the ground.

Ah, but she was a flawless jewel, whose luster he would never tire of beholding. She was the fragrant honeysuckle of the night; she was the glorious daughter of a glorious land. . . .

Some instinct, or his previous training, kept him from touching upon the thing on which her own numbing mind was fixed—Buena Esperanza, although he already saw himself as its master. He saw, in his mind's sanguine eye, the great bed upon which he would spend his siestas . . . and seldom, for a time at least, alone. He tasted the rich food, vastly different from army fare of tough beef and cowpeas; he heard the pleasantly servile voices of the *cholos*; he rode magnificent horses trapped with silver, counted the herds of fat cattle, fingered the wealth which must be don Estevan's.

He did all these things, but said nothing about them.

Hilarita had conquered her fear. She wondered now if her distaste for Cienega would ever leave her.

She had no longer any desire to fence; she wanted the first horror over while she had the courage to bear it.

The face she turned to don Ygnacio was chalk-white. For all the feeling that was in it, it might have been a doll's face. What use in protesting? Don Estevan had placed Buena Esperanza—good hope!—in her care, and there was but one way of saving it. Her father would assuredly protest the price, but had he not said "any price"? She herself was the price; she would pay it, and without haggling. She had thought, in Ricardo's arms in the patio, that she could not do it, but found otherwise. She did not think of it as inevitable; she was almost past thought. Her black eyes, lusterless, came up to don Ygnacio's eager ones.

"Take me when you will," she said steadily.

Triumph welled up in Cienega. He leaped to the ground and assisted Hilarita down gently—so gently that it disarmed her.

The next instant she was in his arms.

Hot kisses seared her eyes blind. Tears came to blot out her misery (she who would never cry!) and she could not stay their fall. They anointed also the burning cheeks of don Ygnacio, and drove him outside himself with love. He kissed her again, and whispered, "I shall always be with you. The end for you and me is only happiness."

Always with you!

The finality of the words made her gulp down terror; she looked the shocked Virgin come upon the body of her dead Son. And so, since life seemed actually over, she was face to face with her dead.

Always!

She had promised her soul, her inmost love, to Ricardo; she thought painfully now, "I love you, Ricardo, but . . . can I keep on doing it . . . when . . ."

It was, she supposed wearily, as if she were already dead, although she must live . . . *always*. The little Madonna would not become the painted figure ever again. Don Ygnacio would be standing before it. . . . There was nothing else . . . never could be anything else . . . save him.

She closed her eyes. When she opened them, she was dully convinced, she would be in her room at Buena Esperanza, and no matter how close to the edge of the bed she moved, don Ygnacio could still reach over and draw her back. It was true . . . his arms were drawing her close, tightly, enveloping her mind as he did her body. . . . She could not struggle nor fight; she opened her eyes at last to shut the horrid future vision out with that, hardly less awful, of the present, and found that she was staring into the face of don Silencio. His eyes seemed to snarl—not at her, but at Cienega's back; his face was a deadly mask.

"What now, dearest of all dear ones?" don Ygnacio asked, feeling her lax body stir against him. "Come . . . let me drink of your lips . . ."

Those selfsame lips (he looked at them appraisingly, gourmandlike, before tasting) were so tremulously white that the officer said passionately, desirous of moving Hilarita with his own fire, "I will kiss them as red as my heart, beloved, and as warm as my blood!"

Then he saw her eyes. The stark terror in them. For an instant, for no more than a pulse-beat in the girl's throbbing veins, he was about to remonstrate angrily. Before the words were in the forming, he read the expression more truly, and whirled around, his arms still about her.

His complete triumph, the savor of the honeysuckle still in his nostrils, and the sweet dew on his cheeks, made him cry, "Back to the rancho, mute fool! I have had enough of you."

Don Silencio did not retreat. Instead, he crept softly closer. Age seemed to have slipped from him, as if he had lost what Hilarita had acquired.

The silent man's previous actions, his constant attendance, had irked don Ygnacio again and again. But now . . . he could speak with the voice of the master.

"Señorita del Valle and myself go to San Rafael," he said, pulling the ends of his mustache to bristling points. "We neither need you, mute, nor want you. Must I do more than *tell* you that?"

The silent man's face became still more grim . . . and still more youthful.

Hilarita tried to stop his ceaseless advancing cat-step with, "Please, go back, don Silencio. You know how uneasy . . . don Estevan is . . . when you are away."

Don Silencio did not so much as shrug.

Firmly, sadly, she asked him, "Please. I . . . I know what I am doing."

He stared at her a moment, as if in disbelief, then,

seeing what her request meant, and what it cost her to say it, he smiled.

The smile was more horrible than any other possible expression.

Don Ygnacio, his mustache satisfying him as at the proper angle, said sharply, "Do you think we need a guard, old one? What savage is there in California who does not know what it would mean to attack an officer?"

The whirr of an arrow told him.

Don Ygnacio looked quickly in the direction of the sound; heard a crashing in the brush, and said laughingly, "Some one shot at a deer. . . . Do you think I am a child to be afraid of what I do not see?"

If don Silencio heard either the sound of the missile or Cienega's words he gave no visible sign.

"He has become crazed, or he is drunk," the *teniente* cried, and reached to his saddle, to pull the sword from the scabbard hanging there.

Don Silencio gave him no time; for all his years the mute Spaniard was upon Cienega before the officer had the blade half from its sheath. The older man jerked the *teniente's* hand from the hilt.

The startled horse, against which don Silencio's sudden onslaught had hurled Cienega, bolted, snorted and galloped rapidly down the trail toward Buena Esperanza. Hilarita instinctively caught the reins of her own mount.

A schemer Cienega was, a coward he was not. He locked his arms at once about the other's body, and they swayed together so on the path. The flame of

fight was brightening in him; his thin lips were tightly set, his eyes wary and cool. He tried immediately to whip don Silencio to earth, but the other twisted like a cat, and was back at him.

Hilarita, unable to move, watched as she would have watched a shadow-show. She saw what each of the straining men was trying to do—work his opponent toward the cliff, and, with a final violent heave, hurl him to the stream a hundred feet below.

Slowly, cleverly, guilefully, don Silencio guided the younger man toward the brink, taking advantage of every foothold, every leverage, only to have Cienega break away.

The *teniente* was near mad with rage. All of his anger had welled to the surface, to seethe there, and be mingled with his desire to show Hilarita what great strength was his—a thing which all women admired, and repaid trebly for a little effort. And now . . . an old fool stand up to him! It was not to be permitted. He tore after don Silencio like a maddened bull.

He lifted him straight in the air, but, at the very edge of the cliff, the mute Spaniard again managed to squirm his leathery old arms about the officer's middle, and hold tight.

Again, body low, arms and legs working for every precious inch of ground, don Silencio, face hidden in the other's bright jacket, propelled Cienega toward the brink: it was his last effort. The fight was becoming more and more uneven; it was plain, even to the awe-stricken girl, that it could last but little longer.

She saw how Cienega was forcing the older man steadily toward the edge, and that the officer's thin lips were curling in a smile. Don Silencio's face was twisted with hatred and futile effort, but all of his old force could not keep the younger man from shoving him relentlessly toward the cliff. The cords in his brown neck stood out, rigid as flesh-covered wires. His arms had all their original force, but his legs, surer sign, were shaking at the knees.

If Cienega could be killed, she would—blessed word!—be free.

If the officer's horse had not dashed affrightedly back toward Buena Esperanza, she might have taken his sword, and, with good San Rafael to guide her arm . . . No, she could never have done it, even though there could be but one ending to the unequal struggle. Don Silencio's strength, she knew fearfully, was no longer companion with his fiery spirit.

Was she to see him, her protector more than once, killed before her eyes, and then be forced to creep lovingly, or with semblance of love, into don Ygnacio's bloody, all-conquering arms? Too much to ask!

The sharp lash of memory brought her back to the peaceful flower-fragrant patio, in which she had told Ricardo good-by, and from which don Ygnacio had led her—along a path ending first in murder and secondly at the altar.

Fatalism made her numb, impotent. Generations of blind devotion told her that all she could do was to bow her head in acquiescence. . . .

Ah, mother of God, don Ygnacio had the kindly old

man to the edge at last . . . he was twisting the older man's arms free . . . in another moment he would . . .

She looked about like a wild thing. A rock . . . a stick . . .

Don Silencio, the silent one, was at the very edge. She had waited too long. No fright was in his desperate eyes, nor bitterness; instead, they burned brightly with an unearthly, unquenchable hatred.

Step by step, inch by inch, Cienega forced him to the brink: at the last possible moment, when Cienega had pinioned both old hands, and the dislodged rocks began to batter against the ferns a hundred feet below, a great voice, a tremendous voice singularly like don Estevan's, cried:

"*Santiago!* Turn and fight like a man, parrot!"

As Hilarita turned automaton-like to glance along the trail, she realized that don Ygnacio turned also, and for the same reason. A gale of laughter smote against her ears. She knew that it had been don Silencio who had shouted. How she knew this was all indistinct, blurred.

Cienega's momentary relaxation and surprise had allowed the old man to wind his own arms about the officer's body, to pull backward and downward with the last unbelievable reserve force, summoned from the deepest well . . . Backward, downward . . .

They were gone!

She fell to her knees, the sound of rolling, tumbling, crashing bodies screaming into her brain. One last dull thud . . .

A bird in the manzanita. The far sweet lowing of cattle.

Slowly, still on her knees, as if an unseen magnetic hand pulled her, Hilarita crept to the edge of the cliff.

They were . . . they must be both dead. Not only that—her exhausted head told her—but she had failed in her purpose. Failed in everything. Failed don Estevan, since the authorities would hold him responsible for the actions and deed of the silent man (silent once, and now undoubtedly silent for ever), and would claim the rancho as recompense, or at least refuse utterly to acknowledge the grant. . . . The blood of two men on her soul. What would Fra Juan say? And what Ricardo?

She was at the edge, and peered down in terror. What she saw seemed a vision, a miracle.

Their fall broken by the water, the two men were locked again in a death-grip. Cienega (had she known it) was almost ready to be satisfied, and leave the older man to follow him back to the trail; death had come too close for the *teniente's* taste, but Silencio, almost before his head was clear, had closed with the other again. This time, Hilarita was certain, the ending was as inevitable as . . . as everything else.

Her eyes started to the skies in prayer; as they swept upward, creeping figures higher up the stream came into being. She saw the sun gleaming on knives stolen from the mission.

The savages—Caynameros, not users of the arrows as the Tah-mahs were—slid from rock to rock, from tree to tree; she counted five naked bodies streaked with

ocher. They did not see her, but were intent on the equally intent and struggling white men.

The Caynameros disappeared behind gigantic fern-fronds; the waving green tips indicated their progress toward the two struggling men.

Hilarita's voice was suddenly her own again. She cried clearly, "*Los Indios! Los Indios!*"

How slowly don Silencio and Cienega came apart . . . and yet how surely her cry separated them. Hilarita was fearful that they would think it a ruse of her own to make them cease fighting, but with the dazing thought a voice, curiously like her father's, roared up to her.

"The horse, Hilarita! Ride, little one! Ride!"

The booming sound crashed up the valley in echo; the cliffs threw it back to the stream.

As if all save her lips had turned to stone, she watched the Caynameros break from the ferns and start running toward the white men below. Then, the thought of bringing men from Buena Esperanza to rescue those two of her own race (no matter what else Cienega might be) came to her; she was not merely escaping, but, if only she could ride rapidly enough, might save them both. How they, two, could stand off five armed savages, she did not consider. She leaped to the horse, and was gone in a shower of pebbles and a spatter of sparks.

XXI

IN THE country of the Tah-mahs, in the shadow of the sacred Tah-mah mountain, dark in the shadowy light of evening, two horses were flashing over the rough trails: Hilarita's sturdy little bay toward Buena Esperanza, Ricardo's great black toward corte madera del Presidio. But even before the girl was half-way to the rancho, and while de la Torre was urging don Arturo to summon paddlers as quickly as possible for the *balsa*, a half-dozen more horses were rushing to meet Hilarita, mounted *apartadores* of Buena Esperanza.

The frightened animal of the *teniente* had cantered at last to the hacienda and mingled with the horses there, calmed by the company of his kind; a woman-servant had blurted the fact to don Estevan.

The *hacendado* had heard it with laughter: "He has probably fallen from the animal," he said. "It would be like a Cienega."

What the *chola* said drove the breath out of don Estevan's lungs and constricted his throat.

"But what if your son-in-law who is to marry the señorita is injured, or perhaps killed?"

So don Estevan heard the one thing which was being carefully kept from him. He needed a moment to understand the *chola's* curiously-worded question, but

when it was clear to him he went fairly wild. So the servants were allowing themselves the pleasure of vile gossip, eh? It was high time that he gave them a little taste of the whip. What sort of business was this, anyhow? What . . .

"Send for Miguel!" he snarled at the end, the blankly dumb lips of the Indian woman answering him nothing.

"Well, Miguel," he began—so seriously that the *apartador* knew his master, for all he was stretched on the bed, was himself again, "it seems that we are to have a wedding here. What do you know about it?"

Miguel scraped a toe, wished he were in the hills and as far as possible from the hacienda, and then bowed jerkily.

"I have heard of it," he admitted fearfully. Who had spoken about it to don Estevan? Who had violated the mistress' strict order?

"H'm! And I . . . am I nothing in this house? I have not heard of it. Now, tell me, fool of a Miguel, what greater fool blabbed this folly?"

The servant did not lie.

"Señorita Hilarita," he said.

Don Estevan's mouth opened wide.

"In one day," he roared, "that headstrong mistress of yours has undone all I have built up in a lifetime. Carrion of the devil! Cienega! Let me but rest one afternoon a bit longer than my usual time, after a little fall from a horse, and . . . What are you gaping at, clown of a savage?"

"You have been very sick, don Estevan. For weeks."

Don Estevan let the statement sink in, to burn down and consume his heart. He was so quiet that Miguel supposed his master was not as completely recovered as he had first believed, and would fall into the usual trancelike sleep.

It was a full minute before the ranchero said soberly, "You . . . you may be right, Miguel. It costs me a little pain to move, and I believe my legs are weak." How weak they would have been without the exercise don Silencio insisted upon he did not know. "Now, Mig'lito, much depends on you." It was clear to the *apartador* that don Estevan was thinking deeply. "Send Rafael to Fra Juan at the mission. When he has properly kissed the padre's hand, he is to tell him that it is urgent for him to come to the rancho immediately.

"Gabriel—he is here at the hacienda? Good! Gabriel is to ride to every rancho, to corte de Madera, Saucelito, las pulgas del Diablo, las Baulinas, el punte del Monte, Santa Antonia, and inform the señores that one week from to-day they are to come here for a fiesta and a *baile*, which will follow the marriage of my daughter.

"You yourself are to take the remaining *apartadores* and go seek this don Ygnacio who falls from his horse like a Cienega would. I do not want him to break his neck"—grimly—"any more than I want him for a son-in-law!"

Since the last order should have been given first, and the others allowed to wait some later time, don Estevan became excited.

"Go!" he bellowed. "What are you waiting for? Ride fast—ride as if the fiends were after you——"

And so hard-riding men raced furiously up to Hilarita as she herself was riding desperately along the trail.

She pointed in the direction from which she had come, saying swiftly, "Don Ygnacio and don Silencio . . . they are in the canyon below the redwood. . . . Hurry, Miguel; the savage *Indios* are going to kill them. . . ."

Miguel, unslinging his own prized gun from its leather holster, cried his men on.

Turning her horse to follow them, Hilarita hesitated. Suppose other Caynameros, made valorous by the absence of the *apartadores*, were attacking the rancho? And her father there almost alone, save for the *cholas*? As she began to ride rapidly toward the hacienda, she heard cries, shots, a savage scream which ended in a wail like the voice of *soo-koo-me*, the great horned owl, who hoots only when an Indian is dying.

In a flurry of dust she swept up to Buena Esperanza, already violet in the hazy light of evening, and dropped at once from her lathered horse.

She ran swiftly into the house.

Don Estevan, eyes closed, lay on his great carved bed as if asleep. She bent and kissed his forehead thankfully.

"I suppose you kiss your parrot-lover in the same way," the ranchero blurted loudly, for all he tried to muffle his voice. "Let me tell you something, fool of a silly girl! Within the week you are to be married."

Her thoughts raced in chaos. So don Estevan knew! At least he was himself again; he would bear the

burden . . . or help her bear her own. She was certain that the men from the rancho had been in time . . . gladly certain, for don Silencio, and wearily certain, for the officer.

"I have been so afraid," she whispered. "Do not be sick any more, dear one. . . ."

"It is time I was well," he snorted. "I can imagine how worried you have been. I can imagine how don Ygnacio has been comforting you. . . . Well, I have already given orders—*orders*, for I am at last managing the affairs of the del Valles—for the caballeros to all be here in just one week. Fra Juan comes to arrange the details. Cienega will probably object, and try to twist you around his finger as he has already done, but I do not care what he says, does, or how he twists. Ricardo will not have very much to say, but I tell you this—he is worth a regiment of Cienegas, and he is going to be your husband."

Misery faced her.

"Well, Hilarita?"

Don Estevan was as serious as she had ever seen him. He had never, in all his life, spoken to her as he did now.

"I can not," she said.

"Can not what?"

"Marry Ricardo."

"No?"

She showed him a face wet with tears: "No."

Don Estevan shrugged.

"It is all one to me," he said, "but you might give me your reason."

"Within the week," she said in a low voice, "I am to marry don Ygnacio."

"No del Valle ever lied before," the ranchero bel-
lowed, "and you had better not be the first to start
the habit. Within the week you are to be married
to Ricardo, and, since I must say it, whether you like
it or not! I can remember how the two of you have
mooned at each other—you will be happy enough, I
am very certain. You are . . . mistaken when you
say you will marry Cienega. It was hardly a lie. We
del Valles have never been known to lie nor break our
word. And——"

"I have promised don Ygnacio."

Del Valle grunted; said nothing in addition to the
all-explanatory sound.

"I . . . I have given . . . my word." She
wanted to say, "I was forced to give it."

Don Estevan fought, conquered, his rage. The
effort it cost him was apparent from his face. He
choked down sentence after sentence, and said at last
only this: "Why?"

Her eyes came slowly to his; at first she hesitated,
choosing her words with all possible care; as the tale
began to unfold she spoke more quickly, almost breath-
lessly. "What else was there to do?" she wailed at the
end. "Had I anywhere to turn? Was I not cornered?
Ah, dear one, do you think it was easy—to love Ricar-
do, and to be the wife of don Ygnacio?"

Don Estevan said, "No."

He had her hand; soon she was hugging him tightly,
as if she would never let him go.

The ranchero stared at the rafters of the roof.

"It is—a trick—worthy of—a Cienega," he rumbled at last. "So you were forced to promise . . . I, Estevan del Valle, break that agreement for you. Your honor and mine, *niñita*, are hardly the same thing. I can not explain it now, but it is different.

"Buena Esperanza . . . well, the good hope is gone. If the grant is not certified, I suppose de la Torre will allow an old man to sit by his fireside at del Monte, and you will not begrudge your father a cup of wine a day . . ."

"You can not go from here," Hilarita cried. "Buena Esperanza is yours! And I have promised. . . . After I am used to him, don Ygnacio will not be so awful. . . ."

"Now," said her father, his voice beating against the rafters at which he stared, "you are completely a fool, even if a dear one! Do not mind my shouting . . . there never was a del Valle who could talk without a noise like the wind. I love you very much, little daughter, and I know what you have tried to do for me. Buena Esperanza is land, and *you* my child. I can see how you tried to reason it all out, and how you were pulled this way and dragged that in your despair. I am only grateful to the good God that I have come to my senses at last, and in time. Tell me—how did Ricardo take your decision? Like a man, eh?"

She answered him only with a question: "You said . . . no del Valle can talk . . . without . . . roaring?"

"It is an old failing of the family. As to Ricardo,

however, what has he been doing about this mess? I want to talk with him. If——”

She hardly heard him. “Then,” she said slowly, “if all del Valles . . . then don Silen——”

A great voice shouted booming from the doorway: “——cio is a del Valle, eh, my little brave one?”

Don Estevan blinked. He coughed. He raked at his beard, and then sat suddenly up in bed.

“Andres,” he blared like a trumpet, “where the devil have you been all these years?”

The two del Valles faced each other.

“With the very gentleman you mention,” Andres del Valle said. “If you must know, Estevan, on a slave-ship. Too long a story to tell now. But I was on it for more years than I care to remember. I——”

“And——”

“It is no wonder you did not know me. Thin wine and wormy corn changes a man. So does the whip, especially when it is warmed up across one’s face. And it has been more than a day, Estevan, since you saw me . . . well, I escaped.

“The Cienegas were not good for you, nor were they good for me, either. But I have returned good with evil, or evil with good, depending upon how you look at it. Miguel! Bring in the little present for don Estevan. Let us see how he likes it!”

Ygnacio Cienega’s face was muddied from the clay-bank of the stream; his bright jacket was ripped in a dozen places. Don Estevan and Hilarita saw then that Andres’ own face had been slashed, and that his clothing was also torn as if from knives.

"A present," don Andres continued gravely, before Hilarita could ask about the Caynameros, "which is really mine to give, since I took him from the savages. A wise man, that Ygnacio . . . a regular Cienega! The *Indios* are so peaceful that he does not need soldiers! Bah!" He began to grin. "Take him if you want him, Hilarita. As for myself, other than using him for dog-meat, I can hardly see what any one would want him for."

Don Ygnacio, torn between failure and rage, said fiercely, "You are insulting, del Valle. As to the savages, they did seem contented, and any man can make a mistake. I am able to recall one you made yourself . . . more serious than misjudging Indians."

"Why did you think them content?" don Andres asked curiously, waving aside Cienega's other protest. "Because they have been letting their arrows fly at Fra Juan?"

Cienega kept to the present. "Those who attacked us were only a wandering band——"

Don Andres sighed.

"I never knew a Cienega yet who was not a fool," he said.

"Perhaps my Hilarita is better qualified to know the sort of man I am than an escaped convict who plotted against the crown!"

Don Estevan shivered with rage.

Hilarita said slowly, "No one knows you any better than I, don Ygnacio."

Her enforced and distasteful plans, so woefully conceived, were tumbling about her ears. She did not

know, now, what to say, to think, to do. Was . . . was the awfulness really over? Could don Estevan do what he said? Was Ricardo to . . . to be her lover and her husband? It was too much to hope for.

"You hear her?" don Estevan applauded. "*That* was the daughter of a del Valle!"

The *teniente* smiled, placing his own interpretation on Hilarita's words. "I missed nothing of what my dear one said," he agreed. "I hope you will always find me a dutiful son, don Estevan."

Don Andres cried, "Try not to choke, Estevan!" When he had cleared his own throat, he said to Cienega, "We del Valles have little cause to love you, Cienega. Your father, and others of your family, drove Estevan from Spain, merely by lying to some one who had the King's ear at the moment. His wife, as I suppose you know, died on the way. I was banished to a convict ship because I knew too much."

"I like you as little as you like me, masquerader and traitor."

"Good. Don Ygnacio, I was hardly a match for you with my hands, but once I had a little, and possibly exaggerated, reputation with my sword. You have heard of it? It does not surprise me. Now, there is a horse outside, and, since I do not feel in a killing mood this night, and the light is poor into the bargain, I suggest that you get on the horse and ride—to hell, for all I care. You need not ruffle your plumes at me: you are a pretty bedraggled picture! Merely be glad that I have neither my brother's temper nor his exasperation, and go."

Don Andres sighed, perhaps from the very satisfaction of talking again.

"I am going," Cienega told him, his head high and defiant. "Not because of any reputation you may have, but because it is the thing for a caballero to do. But I add this one thing, del Valle: I, Ygnacio Cienega, have refused to attest the grant for Buena Esperanza, and you will please prepare to leave it when I return with the formal order."

"You will find it ready for all the ill uses you will put it to," don Estevan said, with the placidness of completely controlled anger.

"Hilarita, dear one, *you* will stay," Cienega said, bowing slightly toward her. "You loved me well enough to admit your passion before I said any word. You love me enough to stay at Buena Esperanza with me——"

She said, "Ah, go!"

He had been so sure of himself; the meaning of the short, intense word crystallized all of his anger.

"You slut!" he whispered.

Don Andres' fist took him across the mouth.

"Do not touch him," the injured ranchero raged. "Nails of the true cross, save him for me!"

His brother stepped back.

"The pleasure shall be yours, Estevan," he said. "The thought of it should help you to recover speedily. I do not begrudge you the enjoyment it should afford. Now, Miguel, you have herded wild cattle before: see what you can do toward starting don Ygnacio on his way to his kennel."

Miguel grinned, and drew his knife.

Before don Andres could stop him, he had prodded the officer several times in the fleshy places.

"One for each tear shed by the señorita," he snarled.

"Be gentle with him, Miguel," don Andres advised.

"Do not prick him more deeply than a half inch. . . . And, don Ygnacio, save your curses until you are out of earshot. I do not like them, and I find that, after all, I have not as much patience as I believed. . . . There, the air is better with him gone! I wish Miguel wore boots, although that is an art the *Indios* do not understand. . . ."

"Thou art indeed . . . indeed here," don Estevan muttered.

"And thou must be deaf!" his brother mocked. "Estevan, my brother, shall we drink a little cup of good wine together? I am dry from these weeks of saying nothing more than from all the talking I have done now." He raised his voice. "Wine! Red or yellow or white, hot or cold, but plenty of it!"

"I never knew of a del Valle to remain silent before," don Estevan muttered. "Why, Andres? And why have you not told us who you were?"

Don Andres shrugged, blinked, and then said uneasily, "As to the first, if I had opened my mouth, you would have known me. And as to telling who I was, I did not know what you thought of me, Estevan. There was a story . . . that I had betrayed you and all of our friends. I waited to find out if you believed it. After I discovered that you did not, or at least doubted, there was this Cienega

business again. If that fop felt I were more than a beggar, a dog to be kicked, what happened to-day would have been impossible. I . . . I had it in my mind, Estevan, that I might help you. You lost more than I, you know."

"They tortured you."

"And you also."

The two brothers made similar noises in their throats, and then don Estevan blared, "Where is that wine?"

Hilarita left them talking both at once; they smiled at her, but were engrossed in covering the vanished years. Their voices made a greater noise than Buena Esperanza had ever heard before.

She went to the patio. It was dusky with evening; soft light from the hacienda burnished to copper the carmine roses; yellow jasmine shone like fireflies. Beside the giant cactus where she had been in Ricardo's arms, never expecting to feel them about her again, she knelt to the bare earth. Her cheeks were wet, her lips and heart were praying, but her eyes were very happy.

XXII

THERE was not a breath of air in the town of Monterey but was laden with the mingled spice of the sea and pine and cypress. It was not so late in the year that the poppy-lamps were not still burning. The morning was warm, although the gray bank of fog now dispersing into the brilliant sky, leaving no trace, had made the previous night delightful.

The land of savages, of hills and valleys and dunes and rock coast, which Fra Juan Crespi had explored for the glory of God and the conversion of the heathen, had changed vastly since the father-explorer of the Franciscans had first written of it:

"The governor, señor don Gaspar de Portola, decided to continue to look for the port of Monterey.* The expedition was in charge of captain don Fernando Rivera y Moncado, with sergeant Juan Robles and twenty-seven leather-jacket soldiers, a lieutenant and seven men of the Free Company of Catalonia, engineer don Miguel Constanzo, and fifteen California neophytes.

"It was decided that I, in company with the reverend father preacher Francisco Gomez"—Fra Juan wrote—"should go with this expedition, his Reverence remaining in San Diego with Fra Juan Vizcaino and Fra Fernando Parron, to make a beginning of the first

**Noticias de las Nueva California*: R. P. Fr. Francisco Palou. Translated from the archives of Mexico by Herbert Eugene Bolton.

mission, until the *San José* should arrive, in order to go in it by sea to Monterey.

"There were seventy-four in this company, including the two friars, the father companion, Fra Francisco, and myself."

When the little company into the unknown land reached the bay of Pines, a letter was buried, giving the latitudes of all points covered; on the second bay, which was judged by the expedition to be Año Nuevo, where the dunes and lagoon was, a second cross was set into the sand. On an arm of it was carved the bitter inscription:

"The land expedition is returning to San Diego for lack of provisions to-day, December 9, 1796."

A year later a second party formally occupied Monterey, and "all the cathedrals and churches proclaimed the joy of the populace, on account of this triumph added to the crown of the King . . . a solemn Mass of thanksgiving was sung for the mission and presidio established at the port of Monterey in the name of San Carlos . . ."

What was established with pain, suffering and difficulty, with hunger and deprivation, now (as Ricardo de la Torre was discovering) seethed with the intricacies of politics.

The deputies selected yesterday were dismissed before *almuerzo* to-day. Measures, drawn up by the new republic in Mexico, died before they crossed the Colorado, and were superseded with others. The general government attempted to utilize California as a penal colony, but, after the first party of convict-colonists

were marooned—with cattle and fish-hooks to keep them alive—on the island of Santa Cruz, in Santa Barbara channel, the plan was forgotten.

Laws were placed in effect solely for the purpose of appointing relatives to oversee them. The lands of the Franciscans—held by the fathers in trust for the Indians—were looked upon in envy. Echeandia, the governor, was torn this way and that: a dozen mouths whispered at his ear.

With it all the Franciscans kept their neophytes together; kept the thought of dissension from the savages. Thirty missions served the natives; served, and taught. "Twice a day they recite the *doctrina*." Even though petty officials investigated the missions about nothing at all but for the opportunity of sucking from their own fingers whatever honey they could scrape from the pot.

To plot and counterplot the *hacendados*, even those living near Monterey where it was brewed, were indifferent. If one meddled with filth, like a Mexican of uncertain paternity, one became filthy also, *verdad*. The land was more powerful than the officials: in good time (and one hoped not far distant) the confusion would wear itself out.

More and more many-hued officers and gold-laced officials bearing high-sounding titles strode in the plaza at Monterey, vying with the crimson-sashed rancheros for the attention of the women and girls who peeped (themselves concealed and unseen) from behind the vine-covered windows. Brown-robed Franciscans padded noiselessly along the beaten paths, coming to or

from San Carlos Borromeo on the Rio Carmelo. Round-faced and paunched Indian children stared solemnly at all the grandeur. *Vaqueros* and *apartadores*, once their masters were engaged in gossip over a cup of wine, galloped through the angled streets and across the plaza again and again on no business at all.

A gunshot from the edge of the blue bay—gunshot only of the bronze-silver cannon of which the entire garrison was so proud—was the barracks of the presidio, in which were quarters for the men, warehouses, rooms for both *los nuevos Christianos* and *los Gentiles de visita*; the smithy, the forge, the infirmary, the kitchens . . .

Monterey, in those days, was California's principal town and principal port.

Hides and tallow from the ranchos were carried down along the road flanked by the sierra de Santa Lucia in creaking *carretas* drawn by slow-moving oxen. Trading vessels, whose very names told of the different ports from which they hailed, unloaded their cargoes . . . *el Sucre* . . . *Grifon* . . . *Laperin*, *Andes*, *Guebale*, *Fulham*, *Washington*, *Maria Ester*, *Minerva*, *Huascar*, *Kiaklta* . . . English, Spanish, Peruvian, Columbian, French, American, Russian, Mexican, Dutch. . . .

Long, double-storied, adobe buildings, white of wall and red of tile, with stairways rising to the upper story, bordered the plaza. If a Californian decided to build where a path was already situated, none objected; a new path was made around the obstruction. Was

there not enough land for a man to have his place where his fancy directed? Other low white houses were scattered outside the edges of the plaza; in some of the walls bright pebbles and sea-shells had been pressed into the moist adobe for ornamentation.

On this breathless, sunny morning an old man sat on his horse near the bright bay. He could see sailors and Indians carrying hides to several small ship's boats, which, when filled with the stiff skins, were rowed to the anchored *Maria Ester* in the harbor. He could see also swooping gulls, breakfasting sumptuously on a running school of fish.

Between the old man and the town was the custom-house, and he turned slowly toward it each time he heard voices; not as an eavesdropper, but through a sort of placid interest in whatever he heard or saw.

He looked no more than sixty; seventy he was. Dressed as a *hacendado*, with gay sash about his waist, a sword-belt with shining, polished silver buckle was strapped across his chest. The horse stood stock-still; the man on his back sat more stiffly than a *ranchero*, as if he had military training. His hair was silver, his grizzled beard was almost white. Two yards of worn tried leather.

Out from the open doorway of the building a young man stepped; coming into the bright light he paused a moment, and gave the watcher opportunity to observe him. A young man, as brown and lean as the other, his face was almost haggard; weariness lined it curiously, and a look of futility, of baffled purpose, made the black eyes blank.

His horse, reins to the sand, had wandered a hundred feet away, and stood in the shade of a twisted tree; the younger man's path in following him was past the other.

When he was within a half-dozen paces, the rider removed his hat, bowed as he sat on his horse, and said calmly, "So they would not give you what you asked, señor?"

Ricardo, tired almost to death, looked up.

He had been riding for three days; he was tired to death and the exhaustion showed clearly in every movement.

He bowed, as if to say, "Even if they did not, what concern is it of yours?" but something in the old man's manner made anything approaching insolence impossible. He bowed a second time, and then said, in a low voice, "No, señor."

"They never give anything, or allow anything, or discuss anything, in the morning," the older man said quietly. "Try them again, after they have eaten and slept the afternoon away." He nodded, as much to himself as to de la Torre. "Try it . . ."

"There is not time!"

"No? I thought that way once. My son, there is, in this world, more time than anything else."

"Not for me!"

The old man slipped gracefully from his horse, and dropped the reins. He walked as he had sat, stiffly, very erect.

"Forty years ago, señor," he said, "I was afraid that I had not time to do many things . . . they are,

many of them, still undone . . . but the *time* remains . . . that is the way old men talk, you think?"

De la Torre, his body swaying a little, bowed, but did not answer.

"How long have you been in the saddle?" the other asked quietly.

"Three days."

"Three days . . . three . . . it is of no interest to you, señor, but once I was in the saddle as long as that, and it was riding across the *camino del Diablo*——"

De la Torre brightened, observed the old man as if he saw him for the first time.

"Then you are señor don Ramon de la Cuesta!"

The old man smiled.

"Does that make me any younger?" he remarked. "If I were you, my friend, I should sleep the morning away, gather all of my arguments together, and, later in the day, return and conclude your business. Merely because you have been refused once does not mean you will be refused a second time. Especially not"——bitterly——"if you have a little gold to argue with, gypsy-fashion. It comes to me that I am hungry. A daughter of mine is waiting for me, and, now, for you also, since you are my guest, don——"

Ricardo told him his name.

"A Spaniard and a caballero! Have you ever heard of don Fernando de Rivera? You have? Well, you are a miracle to me, don Ricardo! Fernando is almost forgotten in these days of politics. . . . If he had had a few like you, when he was *comandante* of the Califor-

nias, we would not be forced to see that flag flapping like a red and green bird. . . . Well, times change, even if time does not. . . .

"Come; I do not mind keeping a daughter waiting, but grandchildren are another matter!"

Don Ramon's horse followed his master; Ricardo was forced to lead the animal given him at the last rancho.

He was numb with the thought of what had happened earlier. Echeandia himself had listened to a quarter of his story, had asked questions which seemed meaningless and—to Ricardo's venture—were; had, then, said that whatever the proper authority in San Rafael desired to do was the proper thing. Could he, *gobernador*, act as notary and judge and clerk as well as governor? It was unthinkable. The government did not appoint him to be a scribbler. He was sorry that don Ricardo had ridden so far on an errand of so little importance . . . and dismissed him.

De la Torre, walking silently beside de la Cuesta, knew the older man's history, although he thought of it only bitterly; de la Cuesta would never have failed in so simple a task. De la Cuesta, companion of Rivera, who had led the first band of colonists across the desert from Mexico, through the furnaces of hell; who had been murdered by the Yuma Indians, and who, it was said, had foretold Spain's loss of California because of the type of settlers he was bringing . . .

Don Fernando—how right he had been! None knew this better than Ricardo, after his audience with

the governor and his dice-playing staff from Mexico.

He was so silent that de la Cuesta patted his arm.

"You are to tell me the story," he said. "No—not now: you are too full of it, and you are too tired. Try not to think about it, until we discuss it. I am an old man, it is barely probable that I may have a little advice stored up in my head."

"I was thinking about it . . . but I was also thinking of what don Fernando said many years ago, and how true it was."

De la Cuesta's old face wrinkled into a smile.

"I am sorry for you," he said. "If you say a thing like that again, I will tell you so many old stories, principally about don Fernando, that you will have greater troubles than you may have now. I am an old man, and it is difficult to get an audience like yourself, don Ricardo! Three days in the saddle . . . yes, I remember when I thought I could no longer stick to one . . . The *pobladores* in Los Angeles, who are now grandfathers like me, were screaming about the devils of hell, but Fernando drove them on . . . the cattle were straying into the desert and we could not prevent them. . . . The Yumas were waiting for us. . . .

"I am the only one left, don Ricardo, who knows what really happened. There was a sergeant of ours, Juan Robles . . . but he lies in San Carlos now, who was as much a man as any one on this earth. . . .

"Here we are! You are saved, for a little while! It is good for my conscience: I should hate to have it said that I talked a starving man into the grave!"

Through cool rooms don Ramon led the tired

ranchero from San Rafael; in the square patio children swarmed over the old man, fighting for the closest place.

"You are a pack of Yumas," de la Cuesta laughed. "What will don Ricardo think of you?" He called off their names one after the other; the bows of the boys were as low as the girls' curtsies.

"Señor don Ricardo de la Torre . . . one of us," don Ramon said to his daughter and to don Antonio, her husband. "Bring him a cup of hot chocolate, and then he is to rest. And . . . what, *niñita*?"—to an insistent girl—"has don Ricardo been fighting *los Indios*? Wait until he has slept, baby, and perhaps he will tell us. . . ."

XXIII

Ricardo woke slowly. In the patio outside his window he could hear don Ramon's steady old voice:

"Headed by Juan Robles, the leather-jackets reached the hills and bluffs of the Colorado, where I had crossed it with the help of a horse a-swimming"—it had been a mule, but de la Cuesta had forgotten—"and, without a sound, swept over them like a wind in an alley. Not even a '*Santiago!*' They wanted to surprise the Indians who had killed the padres and don Fernando.

"Picture them, babies! Into the village of the Yumas they swarmed, with their swords out. Proper riders for *el camino del Diablo!* Death was in their hearts, and the thought of revenge. They found only two things: death, and silence.

"The jacals of the rancheria Purisima Concepcion had all been burned by the fiendish Yumas. Not one stood.

"The mission was gone.

"But there was a little mound, covered with grasses and some yellow river-flowers, where a frightened Indian had placed the two good brothers.

"And when our *soldados* found don Fernando, he had no last smile on his face, although he had died like a brave man. It was as if he knew the future

story; that California would be lost to Spain some day, just as I know that some day it will be a greater land than ever, once the proper time comes!

"Don Fernando loved me as much as I love you, little ones, and we must make California a great land for his memory. We——"

"Tell us how you and Sergeant Juan Robles returned to the rancheria and killed a thousand Yumas!" a boy cried fiercely.

"If you wake our guest, baby, the way the Yumas die will be pleasant when compared with what happens to you!"

Ricardo rose stiffly from the bed. As he brushed his clothes an instant, before discovering that *cholos* had already made them immaculate, and had mended the rips made by tearing brush-claws, his hand struck something which bruised his fingers. He reached into the jacket's one pocket, and drew out a little sack, filled with gold coins. He did not open the pouch; the thought of the old Spaniard's kindness warmed him. "You may not be refused a second time, provided you have a little gold to pave the way," don Ramon had said. California-fashion, he had made certain that Ricardo was furnished with what was necessary, although he could have no idea what de la Torre's business was.

De la Cuesta pushed the protesting children out of the patio; when they were alone he said to Ricardo:

"Do you hear the trumpets? Echeandia's glorious soldiery are marching up and down the plaza. If they are soldiers, I am a Mexican! Once he has finished

taking their salutes, he will realize what an important man he is, and when you talk with him you will further the idea. You understand? 'Most illustrious governor,' you will say, 'this matter is of trifling importance, and I apologize for taking up your time. But your devotion to duty and your never-ending pains are so well known that I have come to you after all else fails me. . . .'

"That is the way to talk to him. And if you can tell him how well he looks, the affair, whatever it is, will be as good as in your pocket. He thinks more of his health than anything else."

"This morning he told me that whatever his subordinates said he upheld."

"This afternoon he will have forgotten about it. If you do not mind, don Ricardo, I will go with you . . . and we can go now. I no longer hear shuffling feet."

Ricardo had told de la Cuesta nothing of what brought him to Monterey; as they walked across the plaza, already slanting with long shadows, he tried to find words to explain. He said suddenly, "If I fail in this, don Ramon, I have failed in everything."

The old soldier only said, "There is such a thing as failing gloriously." When they were at the doorway, he added, "Let me speak the first words, don Ricardo. I was never a diplomat, but I have learned a twist or two about the business."

"Why do you——" No; that would never do! "It is good of you to take so much trouble for me, don Ramon; you do not know me, nor what I want from the governor——"

"You want what a caballero should want, and it is no more than my plain duty as another caballero to help you. Hush. . . . These attendants have ears on their sleeves. . . ."

Echeandia, governor of California, was signing document after document; when he looked up, a frown on his face, old and young man bowed.

"I thought it was more Franciscans," the *gobernador* wheezed. "They are trying to confound me with permission to dispose of the . . . what do they call it? the liberty, occupations and goods of the converts! What do you suppose that means, don Ramon? And they remind me that their coffers—only they say it is *los Indios*—have several million dollars, if you can believe it, coming to them for unpaid supplies! In return for their impertinence, I am suggesting—and I can have it made a law!—that the spiritual affairs go to secular priests. Then our interfering Franciscans can retire to their monasteries, or undertake new missions somewhere else. They are always boasting about themselves! Listen to this, señores: '*El misionero es una solo persona, que poco necesita y con poco se contenta. No tiene mas hermanos, ni hijos, ni parientes, que los solos neofitos.*'*" Is it my fault that they have taken vows of chastity and poverty and sanctity; that they have no sons nor brothers! Is it any fault of mine? Am I to blame that——"

Don Ramon held up his hand.

"You must not excite yourself, don José," he said.

* Answer to a letter addressed by José Maria Echeandia to the Franciscans by Fr. Duran.

"You have been looking better than I have ever seen you: do not let these little annoyances provoke you."

"I am tortured beyond belief, and you call it little?"

"To you, yes."

José Maria Echeandia shoved his chair back from the table, a chair of ebony, with marble seat, and disk of marble in the back—brought by galleon from China. "I have a great deal to stand," he said. "I do not think of myself. I must do it more. You are wise in reminding me of it, don Ramon."

"I came for that very purpose. I was wondering, this morning, when my young friend came to visit me, whether it would not be advantageous for you to spend the hotter days in a healthier climate."

The governor's face clouded: "You said I looked well——"

"Never better. I was thinking of conserving your strength for the vexations of state, and so I came here. You know the Franciscans have a mission at San Rafael—our men go there to retain their health and to rest, or to be made well. Some of the cures have been miraculous——"

"Would you have me taking charity from the Franciscans, don Ramon? When I have been——"

De la Cuesta waved his hand, and shook his head.

"My young friend—a de la Torre, whose family you undoubtedly have heard of in Spain—came here on a visit; he suggested that your Honor might spend the uncomfortable months at his rancho. It would be a great honor to them, naturally . . ."

Echeandia looked at Ricardo.

"You have a healthier complexion than our men here," he said slowly. "How are the nights at San Rafael, in summer?"

Ricardo said gravely, "Very cool, don José. One needs blankets, and the hot chocolate in the morning is grateful. It is a healthy place, ours, and how good for the appetite you can not imagine."

Don José nodded thoughtfully, and rubbed his long sallow cheek.—

"How are the savages at San Rafael? Ah, I saw a report which came to me: they are so docile that we no longer need troops there. If you can believe it"—to de la Cuesta—"an Indian at San Luis Rey publicly denounced me as a tyrant and a fool! The padres wrote me that he declared I was only fit to be killed!*" And all because I intend to emancipate them from the mission chains.

"The Franciscans let the Indians get out of hand. They no longer till the fields and care for the cattle as they should† although, by contrast, the ranchos are more profitable than ever.

"Nothing but trouble, and señora Echeandia believes more of it will kill me." He patted the rich embroidery of his vest, drew an experimental breath, and then added hopefully, "Is your climate good for the lungs, don Ricardo? There is a little rasp inside which worries . . . señora Echeandia. I have no time for worry, but you know how it is with a woman."

"There is nothing the matter with your bellows," de

* Letter in the California Archives, Benicia.

† Letter in the California Archives, Monterey.

la Cuesta said soothingly. "What you are going to need is rest, comfort, and a month without . . . worry. It is only too bad, after don Ricardo has invited you, that he may be prevented by losing his grant——"

Echeandia said sharply, "What?" as Ricardo started. De la Torre realized that the old soldier had misguessed his purpose at Monterey. Had stiff pride prevented him from explaining it all to de la Cuesta? He did not believe that it had: he had thought don Ramon would introduce him to Echeandia, and then allow him to tell his story. If explanation was ever needed, it was needed now. Don Ramon's subtle plan no longer had any chance of success: it remained for Ricardo himself to try his hand at what had already once failed. It seemed strange that Echeandia did not recognize him as the suppliant of the morning, although, before, the governor had never bothered to look up at him.

"Hardly mine, don José," the younger man said swiftly. "It is that of my betrothed, and which——"

"Will be your own some day," Echeandia finished, waving the objection aside. "It is all the same thing. And it would be a strange way to reward a subject loyal enough to think of the welfare of the governor. What is the name of this rancho?"

"Buena Esperanza."

"A good name . . . perhaps it is an omen for me. Yes, I must be of good hope! I suppose the trouble is a little debt or so?"

At a wink and gesture from de la Cuesta, Ricardo drew out the pouch of gold and dropped it on the table.

"It is certification that is needed," he said. "And there are surely expenses connected with it, don José. May I pay for them, at least in part?"

Echeandia swept the gold into a little drawer. "Certification, eh? A small matter, a very small matter, but, as you say, with certain legal expenses." He raised his voice. "Prepare a certification of the grant of Buena Esperanza, near San Rafael, and bring it to me to sign."

As de la Torre opened his mouth to thank him, he caught the old soldier's eyes, warning silence.

"I long for coolness in summer," Echeandia said soberly. "Would it be advisable for me to bring any supplies . . . or a cook?"

"We . . . we . . ."

De la Cuesta came to Ricardo's aid: "You will need neither, don José. And, if you can take the word of an old soldier, I believe that the wine from northern grapes is especially beneficial. I am heartily sorry I can not spend a year at San Rafael. It would give me back a few years of youth."

A subordinate, as ornately attired as the governor, sidled to him and whispered in his ear.

"*Que hemos de negarnos!*" Echeandia snapped. "I should say we are not going to refuse! Do you think this caballero would be here if the boundaries were not correct? He is acquainted with the land, and knows what he is talking about. He has been here too long already on the business, and, being a man of sense, wants to return to a better climate. What? Who?" He waited for the clerk to whisper again. "Cienega?"

I never heard of him. What is he? A *teniente*? And am I to take orders from him? Draw up the certification, and bring it to me!"

His face was flushed as he turned to don Ramon and Ricardo.

"I see what delayed the certification," he said angrily. "Some officer was too drunk to examine the boundaries, and, rather than take a little exercise, which would be a good thing for any man, wrote that the boundaries were incorrect! A *teniente*, if you please, tries to tell me what I am to do! Tears of the saints, I do not know how I stand it! If they would send me men of sense, instead of mules who could be used in the fields at home* I would be better off! The Franciscans are after me, the rancheros are after me, the officers are after me, and my own staff tell me what I shall do . . ."

"You need a little rest, free from vexation," don Ramon said again. "There is too much on your shoulders."

"I am going to try to take your advice, and accept don Ricardo's invitation. It will be several months before I can . . . but I am not my own master. Here"—handing de la Torre a sealed and ribboned document, after sprawling his signature across the bottom—"is what you requested, and it is little enough after your kindness. I am going to come when I can . . . don Ricardo, if you have the time, will you be my guest? There is to be a fight between a bull and a bear at the plaza de Toros within an hour,

* Letter from Echeandia at Santa Barbara.

and it may be worth seeing. If we only had a *matador* or two here, we might have proper entertainment, but I am told this bear is a fierce one, and there is sure to be some blood shed . . . no? . . . some other time, then . . .”

Outside the room, de la Cuesta said bitterly, “That is the only sort of blood he will ever see! I almost guessed your mission wrong, eh, don Ricardo? But it was just as well: Echeandia has a romantic turn of mind! Now you have the business settled, and to your satisfaction, I am going to make you listen to a few stories: it is the best reward you can give an old soldier. We will go to my daughter’s house first, and when we are comfortable, and you try a *cigarillo* brought from the Philippines, I am going to tell you how . . . h’m . . . tell you how . . .”

He stopped, and glanced quietly at de la Torre.

“If it is as bad as that, boy,” he said, “I will have a fresh horse for you in less than two minutes!”

Ricardo’s face lighted; he said slowly, “I hardly expected to succeed, don Ramon. Without you, I could not have done it. Can you guess what this means . . . to me, to my loved one, to my friends?”

De la Cuesta said, “Well enough. And I am not the man to delay you. Time is everything to you, although you have much of it remaining; to an old man, with little of it left, it means nothing. Strange, eh?”

They walked silently across the plaza. The swift night was making it a place of purple shadows; a twisted tree became a many-armed ghost. Somewhere

before a house a gallant twanged at his guitar, and sang in a high clear voice. Laughter drifted across the plaza. From the presidio the gay shouts of men, waiting to go to the combat between beast and beast, made Ricardo thrill curiously. To the west, on the dry sands (soon to be wetted) pitch-pine flares showed the enclosure for the fight.

The singer's voice rose more clearly:

"All your love
Has chanced to shine
Straight into
This heart of mine!"

Don Ramon chuckled.

"She must have dropped a rose to him," he laughed. "It is good to be young, Ricardo!"

Again and again de la Torre sought for words to thank the splendid old Californian. He was actually on horse before he stammered, "Don Ramon, you have done much for me. I . . . I . . ."

"I did little," de la Cuesta said quietly. "Others did vastly more for me. A good many years ago, when I was an untried youngster fresh from Spain, Fernando Rivera made a man of me . . . yes; I am not boasting; he did that very thing. Some of these days I am going to tell you *all* of his story . . ."

The old man paused, and was silent so long that Ricardo believed he was done.

"Ricardo, there is this one thing: the people—nine out of every ten—who first came to this land are as

unable to hold it as they were to conquer it. You, and those like you, are the last tenth. Keep what is yours! It is a glorious land, and made for a glorious people. You may think I am a foolish old man, but I have seen what I have seen." He stopped abruptly, and smiled up at de la Torre. "When I stand before my own hacienda, and see my broad leagues of land, so rich, so lovely, it makes me believe that the good saints were very good to California. . . . When you are old, Ricardito, I could wish you nothing better than the land, and children, and grandchildren, even if the wish seems a senseless one to you now. . . . And, now also, ride home, boy!"

Ricardo rode to the edge of the plaza, and then turned.

The silver-haired ranchero, once an ensign under Rivera himself, was standing motionless and watching him (or so the younger man thought) ride away. The buckle on his sword-belt glinted in the first light of the rising moon. Once (although Ricardo did not know this) the warlike ornament had been strapped across Fernando Rivera's own brave, unconquered chest.

Ricardo raised in his stirrups and waved his hand; he waited for de la Cuesta to return the salute.

The old Californian did not move. He seemed, in the soft and hazy light, to be standing as if at attention. Nor did he move, nor Ricardo, until the bugle from the Mexican garrison blared. Then his head seemed to bow, and he walked very slowly across the dim plaza.

Ricardo's throat, for some reason he himself did not know, became tight. He saw the old man go clear across the plaza before he touched the horse with his spurs, urging it across the hard white sand and toward the north.

XXIV

BUENA ESPERANZA was preparing for the marriage-fête—preparing for it with a certain curious grimness. At any moment the authorities, backing Cienega's refusal to attest to the grant, might send leather-jackets or Catalonians to oust the del Valles. The bridegroom himself was absent: according to Fra Juan, he had gone to see what could be done about certification. Anything (all believed) might happen to de la Torre: an arrow, since the Tah-mahs were growing bolder daily; imprisonment at Monterey, since his hot words, undiplomatic, might readily lead to serious trouble with the Mexican officials.

"In a week," don Estevan had said; he went ahead with his preparations despite Ricardo's absence.

These preparations were lavish.

Eggs were blown, and filled with perfume, with lavender-water, with bits of silver or gold paper; these *cascarones* would be broken gently over the heads of the women when the fun was at its height, and the rooms filled with the odor of a hundred blossoms. The picnic place in the shady redwoods was swept with brooms. A giant black bull was being baited to make sport for the younger rancheros.

On the fourth day Fra Juan arrived; he would accompany the caballeros and their ladies from Buena Esperanza to San Rafael Arcangel. He said little, but

from his few words don Estevan feared the worst—firstly, a messenger had come to the mission with letters, of which the padre did not know the contents (and which was cause for much of his silence); secondly, the Tah-mahs had deserted the mission.

On the fifth day the pit was dug for the carcass of a fat beef; the coals were blown to a blaze, and giant redwood logs began to smolder slowly.

The women prepared Hilarita's dress of whitest silk; they were of necessity forced also to cut and make her satin slippers, since don Ricardo was not there to do this as he rightfully should. The fillet for her hair, of white satin blazing with a silver star, was fitted and waiting.

Hilarita herself was in turmoil.

She could not believe that she was to be married . . . to Ricardo, to her lover. Buena Esperanza's fate was now out of her hands; don Estevan was ruler again, and her part was that of his dutiful daughter.

She was a puppet in the hands of the women—a lovely, fearful, happy puppet. It still seemed impossible, this sudden twist of fate.

"It was all in God's hands," Fra Juan told her comfortingly. "Think you He would ever hurt His own? He tried you, that was all, my daughter."

On the sixth day *cholas* went to gather buckets of wild strawberries, while the men of the rancho were sent to catch gleaming trout and shoot the plump quail. . . .

The morning of the seventh day was clear and cloudless.

By nine don Patricio from Santa 'Antonia, followed by four armed herders, rode blithely up to the hacienda; no sooner was he out of the saddle, his broad face in a grin, and drinking the first cup of wine with don Estevan, when doña Luisa and don José arrived.

"I have heard of many silly things in my life, don Estevan," señora de la Torre said shrilly, "but a wedding without a bridegroom passes any understanding . . . even if we women would sometimes like it better that way——"

Don Andres (and the guests bowed to him, although they were anxious to get a closer look at don Estevan's newly-found brother) bent over doña Luisa's hand so cavalierly and gracefully that she was mollified at an attention usually not accorded her.

"Where do *you* think Ricardo is?" she asked, as if she had great confidence in his opinion. "And will he be here to-day?"

"Who ever heard of a wedding without the man—just as you so wisely pointed out," don Andres, who had been the silent man, countered cheerfully. "I understand why the rancho of del Monte is so rich, and why señor de la Torre has prospered so, señora. Your wise guidance——"

She waved her fan at him archly.

"We must find a wife for you," she smiled; "a man of sense is rarely found in this land of savages, and we can not let you go to waste."

As she walked pertly into the house, very pleased, to see Hilarita's finery, don Estevan glared at de la Torre. "That," he said, "is the way to handle her,

José. Pattern yourself after Andres, if you refuse to beat her——”

“If I tried compliments, she would break a plate or two over my head,” don José said mournfully. “She has been worrying, and takes it out on me. If it keeps up, I am going to be a sick man . . .”

A cloud of dust brought don Juan from las Baulinas, with his men behind him. After the newcomer had gulped down the cool wine, and wrung don Andres’ hand, he said, “I passed a rancheria of *los Indios* on my way here, and it was deserted. Even the dogs and the women were gone, although the smell remained. What do you make of that, señores?”

“It is not so important as Ricardo’s absence,” don José muttered. “I hear about it morning and night, for the Angelus and for Vespers. Where is the boy?”

It was Fra Juan who answered both questions:

“What and where, indeed,” he said.

Del Valle, even after he had been told where Ricardo had gone by the padre, believed that a week was sufficient for the venture. A week *should* be enough, if a man rode hard and accomplished his business without any waste of time.

Hilarita, don Estevan had determined fiercely, was to be married from her own hacienda, like the lady she was. He realized now, with bitterness, that he had dived into the plans for the event solely to keep himself from considering the loss of Buena Esperanza. He had directed everything, been in the midst of every preparation, indefatigable. However, he said firmly now, his great voice carrying conviction:

"Ricardo will be here. He comes . . . with . . ."

The definite statement from the ranchero satisfied the troubled padre.

"With don Arturo from corte de Madera? Good! He would take the shortest way; that is why don Arturo is not here already. The English are always prompt——"

"And the Irish," don Patricio laughed, "are always dry."

"That is a thing I suppose you will have remedied before noon," the padre retorted.

"I intend to do my best, father! Do we have weddings every day here?"

Fra Juan said slyly, "If that is the only time you get drunk, my son, we must have them once a week. . . . Do you celebrate every *Indio* marriage?"

"There are times, father, when I think you are an Irishman! You have too ready a wit, but when don Arturo comes, we will band against you and give you the worst of it . . ."

Ricardo indeed was riding with Arthur Wayne, the ranchero of the bay-side grant; riding with new fury, with don Arturo following him with difficulty. The grant, signed by Echeandia, was under Ricardo's coat.

Up the *camino Real*, the highway of the King, de la Torre had ridden; through the two San Josés, San Juan Bautista and Santa Clara de Assisi. He rode hard, on strange horses; he stopped only at night, and then was gone with the first light. At the mission of San Francisco Assisi the padres marked his exhaustion, and pleaded with him. . . .

"Within the week," Hilarita had promised Cienega: within the week, he, Ricardo, must be back at Buena Esperanza.

It was still dark when Indians shoved the fragile *balsa* from the shore of the bay. De la Torre, so near home now, fretted; the craft was caught in a rip tide, and made slow work of it across. Near Alcatraz, that jutting and barren island in the bay's middle, they were carried back and forth, fought over by the racing waters from the two rivers—Sacramento and San Joaquin—hurrying out through the narrow stretch to the Pacific.

De la Torre, in the reed canoe, urged the Indians ahead with deadly earnestness. The frail, poorly-made *balsa* began to leak as the neophytes strained to master the choppy seas; de la Torre did not think of danger, but only of haste.

The black waters of the bay turned to silver, and then were bronze as the sun seemed to leap across them; with the coming of day the tide changed subtly, and the paddlers drove the clumsy canoe with increasing speed, headed for the shore below the rancho of corte de Madera.

The Californian found Arthur Wayne dressed in his finest, and ready to ride: he had asked him, "Where are you going so early, don Arturo?" in answer to the other's: "How did you return so fast?"

When the Englishman said merely that there was to be a wedding at Buena Esperanza, de la Torre cried: "And why are we waiting here?"

Out of corte de Madera they rode after what was to

de la Torre a terrible delay, but consumed only minutes while a horse was saddled for him; the Englishman did not keep animals ready to ride. Ricardo believed that Fra Juan had been unable to stop the wedding. This was his one remaining fear. If only Wayne had allowed himself sufficient time to reach Buena Esperanza before the marriage!

"If you break your neck," don Arturo cried finally, "Cienega may be the lucky one after all. In God's name, Ricardo, be a little careful!"

For answer de la Torre urged his horse to a wilder gait.

He was no longer riding easily. He was drawing on the last hidden strength he believed he possessed, and his face, his entire body, showed his strain.

As the trail left the marshes, neither man slowed his horse. Something of the Californian's fever reached the more stolid Englishman; he understood the spirit which drove the tired body of the ranchero forward.

Up the rises, and down the descents. . . .

De la Torre rode first, Wayne directly behind him. Neither spoke. Wayne rode easily, but the other swayed a little in the saddle. The Englishman wondered if he might not fairly fall from the horse at the venture's end . . .

At the thought he spurred his horse: de la Torre's own animal had leaped away from a whirring snake in the trail.

Had Wayne not driven the spurs into his own animal, de la Torre might have conquered the horse's

fear: as it was the two beasts smashed together, and went down in a dust-raising mass of horse, man and silver equipment. . . .

The Englishman came to his feet almost at once, and dove almost headlong into the flurry of kicking legs to extricate his companion. He felt burning pain on his thigh; pulled desperately and managed to get de la Torre away.

The two men, without a word, struggled to get the animals to their feet.

What Wayne said proved bitterly Ricardo's own belief:

"They have each a broken leg. . . ."

Ricardo looked an instant at the stricken animals. He said wearily, "If you can get your gun from the saddle, don Arturo, we can stop their misery."

They began to walk silently along the trail.

Wayne said once, "Why does a horse watch you when you shoot it?" and de la Torre answered, "I once saw an *Indio* cut a horse's throat after it had broken a leg. . . . This was more merciful."

Merciful! It came to him that Cienega, at no time, had shown mercy. The thought quickened him. Unaccustomed to walking, the two men were making slow work of it. De la Torre was stiff from days in the saddle, stiff, and very tired.

His head was low as he strode ahead; it was still low when the sun was high, but when they were below the crest of the last ridge it came high.

"They should wait for evening," he said in a low voice. "If they have——"

"You will be in time." Arthur Wayne looked at the mask of his companion's face before adding, "I am aching from this walk . . . how must you be?"

De la Torre told his friend: "There is no feeling in my body, but my head is . . . too active."

Every beat of his heart was saying, like a fearful litany, "Hilarita-rita-rita." For no reason, the song he had heard in the Monterey plaza began to beat on his ear-drums again: the thing about love:

"All your love
Has chanced to shine
Straight into
This heart of mine."

All her love. . . . But what was it to mean if she were already married, and to Cienega? Hilarita had said, "We will never forget," but, now, that seemed to help little. He had thought of her loss with bitterness; how much more terrible it would be to have the means of winning her . . . and then losing. He did not curse the horse, nor the nearness of Wayne at the time of the accident; he did not even think of Fra Juan's "It is in God's hands . . ."

He had become, at last, an automaton, walking ahead, going through the motions like a somnambulist.

Behind him, so urgently that it snapped him to consciousness, he heard Wayne's voice: "Stop, Ricardo!" The Englishman spoke in a whisper, and said instantly, "Look at the top of the hill!"

De la Torre obeyed, mechanically, and then slowly reason flooded through him.

An Indian . . . two . . . a dozen. Black shapes against the pale night. De la Torre for a moment wondered how it had grown so late. Slowly he followed the line of the ridge about Buena Esperanza, on the other side of which the pear-trees grew. When he had counted, deliberately, as if the exact number were important, a hundred and eight evil forms, he turned to Wayne.

"It has come at last," he said, his own voice controlled and low.

He had thought—hours before—that his head, like his body and legs, had become numb, and no longer a part of himself. Now, it was clear, and every finger was beginning to tingle with life.

The Englishman raised the gun with which he had shot the horses.

"We can at least warn don Estevan," he said.

"Listen!"

The two men could hear a mumble of laughs, voices, a muffled cry.

"They will hardly hear a shot at the hacienda," de la Torre whispered. "They are laughing and making too much noise inside the house. Ah . . . watch . . . there where I am pointing!"

One of the Tah-mahs had dropped to his knees, to his belly . . . vanished. His mates, like chessmen waiting the move of a master-hand, resumed their original positions.

"I know where he went," de la Torre said, under his breath. "What he did, we may be able to do also. It is the only chance we have to get to don Estevan."

Wayne, without understanding, nodded.

Ricardo first, Wayne following him, the two Californians walked rapidly along the trail, stooping out of sight where there were no concealing bushes. Up the hill they wormed their way, leaving the trail at last, their eyes fastened on the Indians who surrounded the hacienda.

The men advanced with increasing care. Soon the pair were close enough to hear hoarse savage grunts.

Ricardo paused, lying flat on his face. His hands had touched wetness.

He knew then that the passage—from the far end of which Marin and Quintin had emerged, near the hacienda, to murder the sawyers—was a dried underground stream, starting from a now impotent spring which did no more than moisten the earth. By means of it the Tah-mahs must have crept close to Buena Esperanza, unseen, while their fellows circled the rancho along the high ridges.

He divined Marin's intention perfectly.

The rancheros had been allowed by the chief to come to Buena Esperanza, where the festivities would lull all to security, where they would prove the easiest of prey. At one stroke every white man would be wiped out. The way in was left carefully unguarded, but the way out would be a path of death.

If the soldiers remaining at mission San Rafael had accompanied their *teniente* to witness his marriage; if the rancheros could be warned; if . . . it . . . de la Torre, on his face, could think of a dozen "ifs."

Followed by Wayne, their hearts pounding furious-

ly, and setting up a noise in their breasts which both men believed must sound to the Tah-mahs like the beating of drums, de la Torre crawled to the mouth of the passage.

Once inside, the Californians crept ahead rapidly. The way was inky-black; the extinct water-course dipped and swerved. Again and again Ricardo smashed against the rocky wall at an unforeseen angle.* His head bloodied with the impact of a sharp jutting rock.

Water-lizards ran across his face and down his arms, setting him to involuntary trembling.

One thing only he knew: they must, somehow, get to the hacienda, if only near enough to warn his fellow-Californians . . . his father and mother . . . don Estevan . . . Hilarita . . .

Would the passage never end?

He tried to hasten, but only smashed into another rock, and found that the shoulder which had been driven against it began to throb. He was glad of the pain. It was tangible, a possible thing in an impossible world. . . .

The black end of the tunnel slowly became the gray-purple of night; a violet of jagged, wind-whipped edges against sable.

Near the opening of the way, in the pear-orchard, Ricardo was able to see the lights of Buena Esperanza, to hear the gay voices of the care-free rancheros. . . .

Wayne reached forward, and gripped at him.

The two men stopped, silent, unmoving as the very rocks. Behind, they could hear a little noise, growing

*The passageway is still to be seen in Marin County, California.

louder and more distinct. Some one, both rancheros knew, was crawling through the tunnel.

As they listened to the scrape of a body against rock echo down to them, as they saw the hacienda whose people and joyous guests they were trying to warn, the purple mouth of the rock flue turned suddenly to black again.

Wayne's hand tightened on de la Torre's battered shoulder, but Ricardo did not feel pain.

The naked figure of a Tah-mah . . .

The scrape-scrape-scrape behind grew louder, the actual sound confused now with the echo as the creeping savage drew nearer.

The naked figure of a Tah-mah! The savage, daubed with ocher, stood squarely across the opening of the passageway.

XXV

DON ANDRES had taken it upon himself to become master of ceremonies. He was arrayed in don Estevan's best; a scarlet-and-yellow sash girdled him, his jacket was heavy with gold braid and gold buttons; it was the first time he had been dressed like the noble he was since he had been shipped, a convict in chains, out of Spain.

A brimming cup of wine as golden as his finery in his hand, he was doing his best to make up for his former muteness,—intentional though it was.

"You do not know what lucky people you are," he proclaimed. "Here you are masters of all your eyes survey, and you all have good sight. You own the glorious earth and the sunshine and the gentle air. Your cattle range the hills in thousands. You are tended by faithful and well-trained servants. None molest you. You need fear nothing. It is an earthly paradise. A woman to love, children to rear, and a priest to shrive you. . . . What more could one ask?"

"That you visit this same priest a little more often," Fra Juan smiled.

"H'm . . . that statement has a meaning, eh? Tell me, have all of your early sins been forgiven, Jua—Fra Juan?"

"Ask yourself the same question," the gaunt padre said sternly, although his eyes were twinkling.

"I have, I have! If you have been forgiven, there is certainly hope for me. *I* was a bad one, Juan, but you were . . ."

"Yes?"

Don Andres realized that the *rancheros* might not understand.

He said very quietly (for him): "Fra Juan, in the world or out of it, has never done an evil thing in his life!" He glared about, as if defying any one to argue the point with him.

Hilarita, in her own room, heard the noise and laughter of the guests. It seemed impossible to believe that she was about to be married. Her hand went to her matronly high-piled hair, dressed by doña Luisa herself, and she smiled hazily. Her eyes sought the little Lady of Sorrows, and the color deepened in her cheeks. Unaccountably, she remembered her fear of Cienega, mingled, heretofore, inextricably with the figurette. How differently she felt, now. Would Ricardo find her . . . lovely? She did not care about beauty, save that he think her beautiful.

Ricardo . . .

He had not come; her questions, to her father and to Fra Juan, were always evaded. "He will soon be here," they said; or, "Be a little less impatient, *niñita*: you will be married all the rest of your life." . . . She was forced to be satisfied with no more than that.

Her wedding-dress of stiff silk forbade her to sit. The white mantilla and the cloak for the ride to San Rafael Arcangel were ready on the bed. The fillet was already bound about her black hair.

An Indian woman fussed about the room, snuffling sadly after the manner of doña Luisa.

Hilarita stood it as long as she could.

Her dress hissing as silk touched silk, she walked finally to the great room of the hacienda. The guests became silent as she entered; even don Andres' booming voice jerked out into unconnected words of no meaning. Her uneasy eyes took in the Castilian roses in the copper bowl brought from Seville, the squat jugs of red and yellow wine (colors of the roses), the slender shapes of the cordial bottles; a heap of oranges brought up from San Luis Obispo de Tolosa seemed burning globes under the flaring tapers.

She saw everything in the room, and then said in her clear voice: "I am ready, my father. Where is don Ricardo?"

For once doña Luisa, with ample cause, did not harangue about the conventions. Her plump face quivered with earnestness; her lips worked together and she seemed about to become tearful.

"Don Estevan, the same question is in all our minds. Where is Ricardo? We know where he is supposed to have gone, but why has he not returned? It troubles Hilarita, but think of me: *I* am his mother, and . . . Silence, José, while I am speaking!"

Having curbed her husband's feeble protest, she became quiet herself.

The visiting *hacendados* were too courteous to whisper, even to glance from one to the other. Nevertheless, indicative of tension, the rustle of a dress sounded like wind in an *arroyo*.

Don Estevan glanced pleadingly at Hilarita, and from her to his brother. He himself, he was realizing more every passing second, had been made the fool, and by his own doing. He had striven to forget the certain loss of the rancho in planning for the wedding; he had actually counted on Ricardo's return. . . . Being a beggar, he considered grimly, would be bad; being a fool was vastly worse. All that might remain his, after losing Buena Esperanza, would be pride—and that he had done away with without help from any one else.

The former don Silencio nodded briefly to the ranchero, as if to say that he was ready with some sort of assistance. Don Andres cared little for doña Luisa's protest; what the guests thought troubled him exactly the same amount. Hilarita, all in white (even to her face) was so breathtakingly lovely that Andres del Valle wondered at it, and wished Estevan had planned a little more carefully, to avoid this anxiety.

He bowed to the angry matron.

"Doña Luisa," he said with tremendous gravity, "you have asked an extremely sensible question, and one which I will attempt to answer in the same wise. *Veras!* It's this way, you see . . . and the proper way for us to consider the matter, as man and woman of sense——"

She waved a thick forefinger at him.

"You can not talk me around!"

Hilarita was standing very tall and very pale: don Andres knew that the girl was listening intently. He believed that she was waiting for him to make some

explanation, and while he was willing and ready to concoct something for doña Luisa, he did not care to fool the girl.

She was thinking this: that her cup of joy had been filled to overflowing, and that something was to dash it to the floor. Fear did no more than tighten her lips, although her eyes widened. Horrible thought boiled through her: in her mind's eye she saw Ricardo in some fern-filled canyon, an arrow in him. . . .

The girl fought the fear down, although she did think, "It will make no difference; I will love him always, and I could never forget him. . . ."

Don Andres cried suddenly: "Listen, caballeros! Horses! Don Ricardo, beyond any doubt. Hilarita, you heard it before any of us, eh? The ears of love must be keen!"

Color flushed the girl's face, and, for the first time, she smiled.

Don Andres was half ashamed; he was by no means certain that the approaching horses would bring any one save don Arturo—and alone; no reason to imagine that Ricardo would be with him. Now the thing to do was to invent some excuse, some reasonable answer, to satisfy doña Luisa and yet not trick Hilarita. What answer? Estevan, poor fellow, was himself, but none too strong; Estevan had been an ass. Why hadn't his headstrong brother waited until Ricardo's return, and then set his date? To say "Within the week" as if one were able to govern the hours! However . . .

"Here enters the happy man," he shouted gaily. "A cup of wine to his health and happiness!"

The door was pushed open. Every ranchero, every woman, was smiling now, and looking toward it expectantly; some of the wives, slyly, tried to observe both door and Hilarita at the same time.

Hilarita's heart, the blood in her veins, seemed to stop: she restrained the impulse to rush forward. Ricardo would not be real until his arms were about her.

The door was pushed open. . . .

"I regret coming at such a time," Ygnacio Cienega said unctuously, "but I find it necessary to take possession of Buena Esperanza in the name of the Mexican Provincial Government, and one is forced to do one's duty, no matter how unpleasant it may be. I dislike to embarrass you, del Valle; remember that I am only a tool in the hands of my superiors, although I try to be a loyal one. The certification of the grant has not arrived, and consequently it has become necessary . . . you can understand how it is. . . ."

He struck an attitude, since he watched all ways at once.

"It is useless to protest," he continued more sharply, "There are four soldiers just behind me. Come in, men, and help yourself to wine. It was a long ride we had, and I am glad to offer you some refreshment."

No one spoke, although don Patricio, the Irishman, was growing redder of face every instant, and the lips of several of the rancheros were curling with disdain.

Cienega's eyes sought Hilarita's. Triumph was in his: he took, it appeared, a sort of pleasure from what he was doing. Love her, in his way, he had; it gave

him pleasure to hurt her now. The girl stared him disdainfully down.

Don Estevan's legs refused to carry his body forward; the ranchero, suddenly, seemed an old man.

The sight of her father's sagging frame made Hilarita flare: "Once I said that the Cienegas were liars. Perhaps I was wrong. Dogs can not speak, therefore they can not lie."

"You asked a dog to love you, once! You could not wait for my avowal—you offered yourself to me . . ."

She sent the truth hurtling at him, the worse because he was at once convinced of it.

From that moment he hated her supremely. Everything he might have waived but that, a clean blow at his own conceit.

"I did not come to talk over what is passed," he snarled. "You have an hour to leave, del Valle. I have no time to waste."

Fra Juan said huskily, "You have the order in writing, don Ygnacio?"

"Do you doubt my word?"

Don Andres prevented the gaunt padre from replying; he said himself, "I doubt it, yes."

Cienega ruffled his plumage—green and maroon.

"You call me a liar?"

"Hardly that, don Ygnacio. What I am trying to intimate is that *all* Cienegas, as the señorita said, are liars. Now, there is no cause to act as if this were an inn, although I suppose you can not help it. Have you your sword with you, parrot? Yes? Come out-

side, then, and I will proceed to clip your wings. You have flown your last."

"No, Andres . . . it is my place, not yours," don Estevan protested unsteadily. "Step aside also, Juan; I will listen to no more advice, old friend. I . . ."

His courage was not enough. He stumbled, his eyes became blank, and he relaxed into the padre's arms.

Don Santiago muttered something, to which the Irishman answered: "You see his like before any drinking-house from Dublin to Barcelona! He is an offense to the nostrils of a gentleman, and if don Andres does not care for any mild exercise this morning, I would enjoy taking it this midday, just as it would give you pleasure to-night. . . . Yes, Santiago, I am a little mixed up, but it is because I am trying not to say words which would hurt Fra Juan, offend don Estevan, and surprise these señoras here, although Cienega would know what they mean . . ."

"I am not here to fight," Cienega said. To the rancheros he snapped, "I advise you not to interfere. This is government business. Don Estevan should have known better than to have planned a fiesta in a hacienda no longer his . . . and for a potential bridegroom who, according to all reports, is now enjoying the pleasures of Monterey, preferring a little flesh and blood to an icicle. . . ."

"Well, Hilarita, I thawed you once, even if you will not admit it! For the love I once imagined I bore you, and in memory of the kisses you warmed my lips with, and the words you breathed into my ear, I will allow you to take one *carreta* filled with your own belongings

from Buena Esperanza. You smile, eh? You have got something out of me?"

He paused. She was smiling; he supposed that she wanted, at last, to plead with him, to protest her love. She was moved, as many women were, with his power.

What a trick it would be to marry her, and then make her pay, year by year, for every hostile word. An idea, eh? *Verdad!*

Smiling? A veritable blaze of happiness; she had discovered, now, that she could not withstand him; the ice was fire. He hated her, but he did not forget her beauty, more devastating than it had ever been before. The *teniente* had mastered many things; he wanted to master it, and her, also. The desire was stronger than his hatred, although, accomplished, he would find it almost an equal delight to bruise the honeysuckle.

"*Niñita,*" he said softly, "I can forget . . . I have forgotten already. And as I have forgotten, so I can forgive——"

"Most generous don Ygnacio," he heard from behind him.

As he whirled about, he realized that the *rancheros* were smiling also, were repeating, one after another, the expression on Hilarita's face. He snarled, backing away a step, "So you would stab me in the back, *de la Torre?*"

For the beat of a pulse Ricardo did not answer. His face, as all could see was bloody. A zigzag bruise, like lightning, darkened his forehead. So complete was the Californians' surprise that none burst into questions.

Hilarita's breath was coming faster; one glance passed between Ricardo and herself, but that was enough.

"I could not even stab an *Indio* in the back."

Arthur Wayne's bulk appeared behind Ricardo.

"I am a witness to that," he agreed.

Ricardo lived again the tense moment at the end of the underground passage. He had, then, drawn his knife, crept close to the unaware Tah-mah blocking the way; he had risen half, and then, knife in hand, found himself unable to stab the unsuspecting savage. Revulsion had set him to trembling, and Wayne, desirous of pushing past the younger man and making an end to the affair, had not the room.

The sound of the second Indian in the tunnel grew closer each moment.

De la Torre had thrust the knife back through his belt, and, leaning forward as far as he dared, had swung his fist in the manner Wayne had taught him, catching the Tah-mah behind the ear. The Indian had dropped like a log from the blow, but not so rapidly that Ricardo had not caught him before he fell.

Together the two Californians had carried the prostrate savage a little way from the tunnel's mouth, and had dropped him by a pear-tree where the second Tah-mah and any mates who followed him might not come upon the unconscious body too readily.

Avoiding silent groups of ocher-painted naked men, the two had crept and crawled (and laid still while Indians passed them) to the hacienda, entering the open, unguarded outer door. . . .

"I have no time to settle this with you now," de la Torre said to Cienega. "I can only assure you that I would like to do it, but . . ."

Ricardo had not Andres del Valle's reputation; the Californian probably knew nothing of swordsmanship.

"But what?" Cienega sneered.

"The gates of hell are about to open. The Indians are ready to attack. If they do not kill us, we will then go into this matter more fully."

"What Indians?" don Ygnacio laughed. "Goblins you dreamed about? Or . . . are you drunk?"

"They have surrounded the hacienda. They have had enough of us . . . of you and your wife-stealing *soldados*, don Ygnacio."

"You insult my men?"

Ricardo, angry at the delay, wondering why the *rancheros* did not all question him at once, said slowly, "Take your men to Monterey, Cienega, and let don Ramon tell them what soldiers are! And what *los Indios* can do to us, when they have the desire."

The *teniente* laughed more loudly.

"Ten minutes ago *we* rode openly into Buena Esperanza," he said. "We saw no sign of any Indians. You are frightened at de la Cuesta's tales—an old man in his dotage. *We* rode here, but I suppose you found it necessary to walk through the earth to arrive?"

"Exactly that," Ricardo admitted quietly.

Arthur Wayne faced the *rancheros*.

"Señores," he said, "the English do not lie. You know my own reputation. I saw Marin and Quintin. Naked and painted. I saw Tah-mahs and Caynameros.

I marked the fiendish Olompalis with their stone hatchets. We can not tell how many minutes it will be before they strike, but if one of them comes across the body of a man don Ricardo struck down, they will attack immediately. You were trained in the army, don Estevan: give us our orders now."

Del Valle hesitated. His head was still clouded; the arrival of Ricardo settled the marriage question, although he supposed the wedding could not take place at Buena Esperanza; the loss of the rancho was certain, since Ricardo said nothing of it; the attack by the Indians seemed of little importance. The other rancheros waited don Estevan's move.

"The rancho is . . . Cienega's . . . or the government's," he said wearily. "If Cienega wants to fight for it, let him. The rest of us can get away. . . ."

A strange don Estevan: the fight was gone from him. The *hacendados* began to whisper together again.

"Cienega's?" Ricardo asked. He looked squarely at the officer. "Lies again?"

The *teniente* did not reply. He had been certain, since no word concerning the grant had been received from Monterey, that final certification had been refused; he had acted accordingly. It had seemed a safe certain supposition. Once the del Valles were gone from the rancho, he intended stepping in, and using what friends he had at Monterey to be accorded a new and proper grant.

"So that is how it is?" don Estevan whispered.

Since the *teniente* said nothing, having nothing to say, del Valle roared, "That is how it is!"

Don Andres snorted with delight; Hilarita's own eyes grew brighter, and clung again to Ricardo's.

The rancho was himself again. He crackled into a dozen orders. Cover the windows with the slitted redwood slabs, caballeros! Send the women to his own room, and have them crouch between the great solid bed and the inner wall. Summon the *apartadores* from the rear house where they were making merry like their masters. Have them bring their arms. See that the *cholas* preparing the feast in the kitchen huddled to the floor and did not cry out. "We will give these savages a wedding to remember," he concluded.

Cienega and his four soldiers he ignored completely. He was not the man to drive the officer out to death, but neither would he have him a defender.

Buena Esperanza . . . his own again!

Hilarita, last woman remaining among the grim men, stepped between her father and her lover. She kissed don Estevan's cheek, and then swayed against Ricardo.

"My very dearest ones," she whispered, and was gone.

Don Estevan said harshly to de la Torre: "She is worth a hundred ranchos!"

What he had gone through, and what might be coming still, made Ricardo articulate. He said quietly, "I love her very dearly, don Estevan."

The room grew dark as the tapers were blown out one by one. Just before the last was extinguished, the rancho of Buena Esperanza made a final survey of his defense. Men were ready at every window, their

guns waiting to be thrust through the slits. The long table had been hastily cleared of jugs and bottles; in their places were leather bags and pouches of powder and ball. A half-dozen swords from the hacienda's store lay in an unsheathed heap, handles toward the table's edge. Oranges rolled on the floor; crimson rose-petals had been stamped beneath men's boots, staining the wood like blood.

Don Estevan caught a glimpse of the padre of San Rafael Arcangel. Fra Juan was praying, but bafflingly curious expressions raced across his gaunt face. Before either don Estevan or Ricardo, watching also, could read any of them, the last taper was blown out.

XXVI

MINUTES lengthened drearily.

Men moved uneasily to relieve cramped muscles. Don Patricio swore with feeling; other than his muttering, the only sounds in the hacienda were the whimpers of the Indian servants in the kitchen and the monotonous clicking of the padre's beads.

De la Torre, stationed beside Arthur Wayne, was strangely exultant. The prospect of death, on the eve of his marriage, did not occur to him; he thought only that he had been able to warn his fellow-Californians, that he had preserved, with don Ramon's help, the rancho el Buena Esperanza, and that Hilarita . . . had whispered what she had. The accident to don Arturo's horse and to his own, and which had slowed their journey, had been, he knew now, a lucky thing. Riding in (and into the trap) they would have never escaped the watching Tah-mahs; they would have arrived safely enough, but seen none of the savages.

Suddenly the keen-eyed Englishman raised his gun, shoved it swiftly through a narrow slit, and fired. . . .

Before don Estevan could chide him for his action, dark figures leaped from the earth all about the hacienda—figures almost indistinguishable—and wild cries accompanied the patter of arrows about every window. Almost instantly bodies hurled themselves in frenzy against the massive outer door.

Don Andres bellowed, "*Santiago!*" and let fly into a pack of racing savages. Callanan's carbine, the Irishman withholding his fire, searched out an Indian painted from head to foot . . . the body twisted and writhed on the ground like a phosphoric snake. . . .

The room became acrid with smoke. The savages vanished against the dark background of the hills and became invisible, although the rain of arrows never ceased. The Californians had no opportunity for a second volley, although they sent bullets toward every moving object.

The hammering on the redwood door continued. None of the slits covered it.

"Let them try to smash it down," don Estevan snorted. "The tree from which that door was made is older than their gods . . . and stronger."

Little don José was about a business of his own. He had selected a dark unmoving object several hundred feet from the hacienda, and was waiting for it to move before firing: there was no sense in a man wasting a bullet. The clump of laurel did not move.

As the Tah-mahs settled to their work, arrows came closer to the slits. Don Estevan roared, "Down, caballeros, until the flurry is over!" and they dropped low. An *apartador*, seemingly following the general action, sank away from his post with a little sigh . . . the crow-feathered shaft had pierced him through the eye, bringing red tears to join the crushed rose-petals on the floor. Fra Juan bent over him. . . .

The Indian women huddled in the kitchen began to wail.

A clear voice came to the men over the *cholas'* terror: "What are you crying about, oh, foolish ones?" they heard. "The walls are strong. There is plenty of powder. Your own men are fighting for you. Are you to be less brave? Are you going to weep on my marriage-day?"

And the thin whine of one of the women—"We will be taken to the north as women of the Olompalis and never see you again . . . *you* may be taken also . . . the Olompalis have heard from the toad-woman who is their greatest god, and the god said . . ."

Hilarita's steady voice whipped the *chola* silent, and as the girl continued talking, quietly, reassuringly, Ricardo thrilled with her courage, and the padre thought, "There is faith! Are we to have less?"

Don Estevan, watching a new pin-point of light—never from the moon or stars—called loudly, "What are you doing in the kitchen, *niñita*? Get to my room again, or I will lock the door on you!"

The answer came at once.

"One more order from you, my father, and I will show you how well *I* can fire a gun! If you do not want me there, you had better not tell me what to do again!"

Andres del Valle shouted to his brother, "And she will do it, too . . ."

While Hilarita had been away from don Estevan's room, doña Luisa's voice had been raised in fear; once it ceased, the rancheros knew that Hilarita had returned, and that her calmness had calmed the others.

The dot of light grew. The savages had fired a

storehouse. Flames swirled high, blazing, crackling; the Indians kept carefully away from the light. At every dark figure the defenders fired; don José was waiting for the clump of figures to break up, that he might have a chance at some chief watching the engagement. . . .

Horses began to neigh in fright.

"If they steal my horses," don Estevan howled, "I will make them wish they had never been born!"

A fearful semihuman scream sent the Californians to trembling instinctively, more with rage than with terror. The Tah-mahs had cut a horse's throat merely to see him die. . . .

Fra Juan picked up a gun . . . and set it down again.

The sound of the hammering on the door changed; hatchets of the Olompalis began to hack at the wood. The rancheros began to eye the solid wood with furtive and growing doubt. If the Indians were able to swarm into the room, the very weight of their numbers would be overwhelming, and they could fight their way from room to room until the defenders were exterminated.

Don Santiago began to fire steadily at nothing at all; don José was cursing with a fluency none thought he possessed. He had discovered what he had been watching, and knew the clump for what it actually was. In sheer revulsion he fired into the leaping flames.

From the women's room: "They will burn us as the animals are being burned!" and Hilarita's instant answer, "Doña Maria, if you feel that way, you had better start praying!"

Some brave, concealed near the hacienda (don Patricio fired at the noise, and as near to the direction of it as he could guess), shrilled: "Save some fine fat meat for me!" and don Estevan knew they had come upon the roasting bullock in the fire-pit. He began to bite his nails in a red fume; he heard Andres say, "Well, brother?" and then went into action.

"Are we to be routed out like rats from a hole?" he thundered.

A great shout from the hot-blooded Californians answered him; Hilarita's voice joined the cry with, "We will be here waiting for you," and, in the little lull, doña Luisa's: "Some one keep an eye on José . . . and see that he returns at once. The night air does not agree with him."

"We will drive them into the sea," don Patricio shouted. "If . . . if we can get to our horses." He began to laugh. "Doña Luisa, will it be permissible for don José to take a midnight swim?"

Don Estevan planned swiftly.

"Don José, you and Santiago and Juan, and your men, must remain behind, to protect the women. Some of the savages may rush down when we are outside.

"The rest of us will gather close to the door—and some one bring in the men and *apartadores* from the other rooms. We gather: we fling the door open and fire once, and then show these barbarians and killers of horses what a sword's edge feels like. If we can get to the horses, and there are any left, I will give the order. If not, we stay together, and teach these devils a lesson they can reteach in hell.

"Juan Estrada, old friend, you are to help also. Pray for us, Juan! Why . . . Juan . . . what do you do?"

The sleeves of the gaunt padre's habit had been rolled back to give his arms free play; the skirts of his brown robe were tucked above his knees. In his hand a heavy sword was swinging.

"I help—to keep—the savages—from the women," he said jerkily. "I have—already prayed. Now—with the help of God—I *fight!*"

The Californians stared awesomely at the padre, then, trembling with excitement, they watched Ricardo release the bars of the door. Fra Juan's "For the glory of God!" rang in their ears as they hurled themselves upon the Olompalis outside the door.

Spanish steel rasped against Indian hatchets, ripped through naked flesh. The Olompalis broke and ran, howling. The only silent ones were on the ground . . .

Tah-mahs were collecting the best of the horses; they wheeled about in surprise at the unexpected sortie. Straight at them the Californians ran, their long swords like gun-flashes in the night.

For a moment there was a turmoil of white men, horses and Indians; bodies leaped together; knives whipped up and down and swords flashed bannerets of lightning. . . . A Tah-mah slid close to de la Torre; the nauseating stench of the filthy body filled the Californian's nostrils; he felt the minute sting of the knife, and (unable to use his sword in the press of dark bodies) lashed out with his fist as Wayne had taught him. The beaten-down body of the Tah-mah

gave de la Torre room to circle with his sword furiously, and make a greater space.

Andres del Valle was slashing and cutting to reverberating roars of "*Santiago y del Valle!*" Don Estevan, a giant among pygmies trying to drag him down, drove the Indians away with the fury of his attack. With cunning the Irish don drew the Tahmahs close enough to slash them; he used every ruse, once simulating death, and dealing that same thing to two savages who leaped at him to rip him in a dozen places before his staggering became a fall. . . .

The rancheros swept the savages before them, and the *apartadores*, headed by Miguel, Rafael and Gabriel, allowed none of the wounded to suffer overlong.

Arrows began to whistle their minor hum, but the white men neither flinched nor faltered. One after another they were able to seize the manes or saddles of the rearing, confused animals . . . good, at last, to feel a brave horse beneath one, and to fight as a caballero should fight!

Marin, chief of the Tahmahs, had made his plans carefully. The hated white men had been trapped at the hacienda—all of them. Even after he realized that they had been warned in some miraculous manner (possibly because of the presence of the padre and supernatural force or divination) he was prepared to hack and burn them out. A frontal attack, in face of overwhelming odds, had never occurred to him, nor to any of the other chiefs.

The Caynameros, armed only with long knives, broke for the hills; the Olompalis followed them. A

half-dozen Tah-mahs, fresh from raiding the mission, and filled with wine, tried to get the story, but the men of the northern tribes did not stop to give it to their red brothers. Marin had promised horses, food, relief from the presence of the conquerors, and women; instead, they were receiving only steel and death from men who fought like the condors of hell.

Here and there a group of Tah-mahs tried to hold their ground, grown valiant by very numbers, and by remembrance that Marin had said every god and devil—and the toad-woman herself—would protect and save them while they destroyed the white men.

As the Californians, knee to knee, rode them down, swords flashing in the fire-blaze, the Tah-mahs lost faith in gods and devils alike.

Some still circled the hacienda, discharging their shell-tipped arrows, but the distance was too great for them to do any damage. Since they were able to see, in the firelight, what was going on, and what the result was certain to be, they began to slip away, to vanish up the gullies and in the thickets. Marin had assured them that no white man would be permitted to kill a single Tah-mah, but they saw what they saw, and it was too much for their taste.

It was horrible work, after the first furious moments. The Indians had been as completely surprised as they had expected the white men would be; they had not the courage for any further stand.

To drive de la Torre on was the story, told in part, by Ramon de la Cuesta in Monterey; how the Yuma Indians had slaughtered padres and soldiers and *pobla-*

dores at mission Purisima Concepcion, and had murdered Fernando de Rivera, who would have kept the Californias for Spain, and prevented Mexican supremacy. . . . A man, that don Fernando!

Yet it was different to hew down retreating *Indios*, instead of meeting them face to face. It became distasteful, horrible, to de la Torre. He reined his horse, and wheeled toward the hacienda. Not a single stray arrow whirled past him. The Tah-mahs were done.

It took more courage, he believed, for Hilarita to soothe the frightened señoras and *cholas* than it cost a man to fight: one forgot his fear, if he had any, when in action: to remain, outwardly at least, calm and placid . . . *that* was a greater bravery. Hilarita had been able to face everything, save only Cienega, without despair; him, at least, Ricardo could save her. He wanted, now, to discuss the matter with the *teniente*. He thought, "He may be a better swordsman than I, but I am not afraid of him. It is my place more than don Estevan's or don Andres'. He is my own age—and I have cause enough."

As his horse trotted toward the house, Ricardo looked toward the eastward. Riding furiously along the ridge, he could see Arthur Wayne, followed by several *apartadores*; Patricio Callanan and his own men were riding straight up the slope, trying to cut off the flying naked horseman fleeing from the Englishman. The fire leaped higher, and in the brighter light de la Torre was able to make out the demoniac night-rider they pursued—Marin himself, mounted upon don Estevan's powerful black stallion . . .

Along the ridge . . . and then Marin must have seen the riders trying to intercept his flight, for he swerved from the trail and took to the brush. Pursued and pursuers were out of sight in another instant.

Rancheros began to return to the hacienda, shouting gaily back and forth.

Ricardo rode slowly after them. He was no longer elate. An overpowering peace, despite the coming discussion with Cienega, made him sober, thoughtful. He did not think of the officer at all: Hilarita filled every corner of his brain.

The Californians did not seem to be entering the house. They had approached it with great shouts (none louder than don Estevan's, unless it was Andres'), but they were now very quiet. De la Torre, filled with nameless fear, set spurs to his horse. At the doorway he joined the others, who stood, wordless. Women from the hacienda filled the portal; Hilarita was on her knees beside a figure concealed by the standing rancheros—Fra Juan's.

The padre's eyes were closed. Tears rolled down his thin cheeks.

None spoke.

While the gaunt padre prayed, terribly, bitterly, don Estevan glared frowningly at nothing; don Andres, his hand to Fra Juan's shoulder, was fidgeting to speak but for once dared not; Hilarita, to break the spell, stood up slowly, her head still bowed, her slender form like a ripple of moonlight. The rancheros from the neighboring haciendas glanced uneasily about, shifted from leg to leg restlessly.

In a terrifyingly dry voice the padre said, "My sins have found me out."

Andres del Valle shook his head to get the ring of the hollow voice out of his ears. His eyes were very bright, and the long scar made by Cienega's whip shone plainly. "If you are a sinner," he said at last, "what hope is there for the rest of us?"

The padre threw up his hands.

"Come and see," he groaned in his anguish. He rose from his knees, tall, gaunt, firelight showing the sunken cheeks; led the way inside.

The long table had been overturned. A scar (shaped like that on Andres del Valle's forehead) showed where a sword had slashed the polished surface. An orange, like a ball of gold, lay against it, kept from rolling by the deep cut in the wood. Red wine lay in a pool on the floor from a broken jug, and, mingled with it, was a second broad red spot, already turning brown.

"Light a taper," don Estevan said harshly. "The place is dark as the pit."

The word set the padre to trembling anew.

In a corner of the room, nearest the door leading to the chamber where the women had been during the attack, was a heap of brightly-clad bodies, felled one atop the other. Cienega's, brightest, was uppermost.

"You see!" the padre said in the same dry voice.

Before a question could be asked, and while the gasps of astonishment still hung in the air, Hilarita said, "He . . . don Ygnacio . . . and his men . . . came where I . . . where the women . . . were waiting. When the Indians began to flee, don José

and don Juan and don Santiago . . . and their men . . . went to join in the attack. They told us we were safe, since the *Indios* were defeated. Then . . .”

She paused.

Her father said, “Go on”; his eyes never left the bodies.

“Then . . . don Ygnacio came into the room. He would have . . . taken me . . . taken me away . . .”

“And you call it a sin to have stopped that, Juan?” del Valle cried.

“For you, Estevan, no. But for me . . . who forgot my vows . . . yes.”

Ricardo, torn also by the sorrow of the padre, thought, “It was not meant for me to kill Cienega, but I wish I had.” He did not crystallize his thoughts further: what he meant, actually, was that he would have preferred killing the *teniente* instead of Fra Juan’s having done it.

Silence: what could any one say to comfort the padre?

Hilarita’s own head was whirling.

Here, at the moment when all should have been jubilation, was her dear Fra Juan saddened for the remainder of his sorrowful life. And . . . hers was the fault. Because of her, in her defense, he had raised the sword; he would never be happy again, since he believed he had lost his faith.

The thought made her wan, turned her face white . . . a tall white Lady . . .

Light from the single taper haloed her head.

Fra Juan's eyes lifted.

What he saw he would never explain, but his somber eyes lighted, and he said, in a muffled voice, "Santa Maria!"

Without transition of time, he was smiling; Hilarita was bending down and kissing his worn hand and was smiling also (why, and how, none exactly understood); the *hacendados* were clapping don Estevan on the back; the women were fluttering about their conquering mates. . . .

Don Estevan cried, "Am I to stand for hours unserved in my own house? Bring wine, you lazy ones!" When the first *cholo* came near him, for the first time in his life don Estevan spoke in a true whisper. "And when the good father is not looking, carry that carrion outside. If Fra Juan sees you doing it, I will give you all the beatings I have promised for many years."

The Californians were all talking and laughing at once, cups of fragrant wine in their hands.

"When don Ygnacio rushed into the room, it made me recite the whole catechism at once, as if I were still a girl," doña Maria told her husband. "*Me hacian relatar todo el catecismo con los brazos crusados . . .* and when I knelt there like a girl, with my arms folded, the *teniente* and his men tried to carry señorita Hilarita away . . . only first doña Luisa protested . . . and then Fra Juan came . . ."

"I did more than protest," señora de la Torre said calmly. "I marked him with my finger-nails, and he can explain the scratches to *el diablo* himself."

Ricardo tried to move closer to Hilarita. He said

thoughtfully, "I did not like don Ygnacio . . . but he was not a coward. That is, he was not afraid; I suppose you might call him a coward about other things. When you, don Estevan, ignored him, it was like a lash to his pride."

"A Cienega's pride," don Estevan retorted, "was always a curious thing. It involves matters, Ricardo, which you fortunately do not understand. My friends, let me explain what the Cienegas mean to me——"

Andres del Valle's voice roared above his brother's: he was thinking that there had been too much of Cienega already, and had no desire to hear more of what he already knew. Ricardo, he believed, had guessed correctly; Cienega was taking his last opportunity to hurt the del Valles, through Hilarita, when Fra Juan had stopped him. Andres wondered how much passion—the cup smashed from the lip—entered into Cienega's last flight. "Estevan and these two children have had enough for one night," he decided; "I wonder if I can get them all into the present, where, happily, there is no longer any Cienega . . .

"Caballeros!" he shouted. "Earlier this evening I started to make a speech . . . about just what, I no longer remember. But here we all are, with the exception of don Arturo and don Patricio, who are certainly having sport of their own; here we all are, and dry into the bargain. Up with your cups, caballeros. . . . I give you Hilarita and Ricardo!"

"Have you gone crazy?" señora de la Torre cried. "A toast like that is impossible until after the wedding!"

"Am I to stay dry until then?" don Andres boomed.

"Your thirst is your own master. Am I to have taken this"—she touched the bruise on her cheek—"from Cienega, in the name of propriety, and then submit without a word to a proposal, regarding Hilarita also, which is as improper?"

Little don José sidled to his wife.

"I am very proud of my little one," he said defiantly.

Doña Luisa's ample bosom shook; her eyes softened, although she snapped, "It is about time that you are, José . . ."

Scratching at his beard, don Estevan said, "It is too late to start for San Rafael Arcangel——"

"It is," señora de la Torre agreed sharply (her fingers making folds in don José's jacket); "do you want us all to get our throats cut on the way? We came to Buena Esperanza for a marriage, and if you men will go outside and tell yourselves how brave you were to drive off a rabble of naked *Indios*"—none of the women had been more frightened than she when the arrows were pattering about the windows—"we will see what can be done to clear this room up so it looks a little less like an inn after a brawl . . . and then we will proceed."

Don Estevan glanced at the padre; Fra Juan glanced at Hilarita and Ricardo.

These two stood side by side and hand in hand, their hearts too full to speak. Hilarita was no longer the vision, the miracle, Fra Juan had seen before; her cheeks were bright now, and her eyes never left Ricardo's. As the padre nodded assent in answer to don

Estevan's unspoken question, he was thinking, "This, in a way, is as much a miracle as the other. Love is a great thing, and these children have it."

"It takes a woman to get things done," doña Luisa continued. She had slipped her plump hand into don José's, and covered the action by glaring at him. "If it were not for me, you would never have been able to have your only son properly married."

Don José drooped so that Andres del Valle came to his assistance. He might have reminded her of Ricardo's own part, and of Fra Juan's: he said, instead, "Doña Luisa, we indeed made a great mistake this night. A great mistake . . . a terrible one."

She asked confidently, bowing a little to don Andres: "And what was that? *You*, at least, have always showed sense——"

Don Andres gestured with his wine-cup. He winked gravely to the Californians.

"We should have sent *you* out to fight the savages," he said. "Then not one of them would have escaped. . . ."

XXVII

DON ESTEVAN carved away at a haunch of venison, the aroma of which would have hungered less stalwart men than the rancheros. Don Andres worked wonders with a huge ham, the meat falling away from his keen knife in perfect pink and white slices. For all his perfection, he seemed to pay little attention to his labor; he talked without end. Silver platters of broiled trout from the cool valley streams, circled with crisply brown bacon, were brought in by the hurrying *cholas*.

Behind every bench and chair a servant stood, watching the moment when his master's wine-cup should be empty.

Wafer-thin *tortillas*, smoking hot, came from the kitchen in high heaps; bowls filled with crimson wild strawberries stood before every feaster. Don Estevan, hungry after the excitement of the evening, cried, "Ha!" when servants entered with a tremendous steak—the father of all steaks—around which hill-mushrooms bobbed and floated in thick rich gravy. He added, "Ricardo, my son, try your hand at carving. Keep the knife close to the bone and the juice will remain in the meat instead of being dissolved in the sauce. You might as well learn the art, now that you are married."

The *hacendados* pounded on the table; don Andres

laid down his knife. He glanced slyly at doña Luisa, and then said, "At last I can offer the toast, caballeros: I say 'Hilarita and Ricardo' and expect you to drink it or quarrel with the best blade in either California. . . ."

Cups rose high, and, emptied to the very bottom, crashed down to the polished redwood of the table.

Ricardo caught at Hilarita's hand under the table.

She smiled at him happily. Married! She could feel the silken tasseled cord which the women had slipped about her neck just before she had knelt with Ricardo at Fra Juan's feet . . . a bond, a sweet silken bond. . . .

Luscious squares of barbecued meat from the outdoor pit were carried to the table on fresh-hewn boards of oak, accompanied by spicy beans cupped in *tortillas*; the tang of delicate peppers and onion and a dozen herbs gave the men new hunger. Did either of the carvers hesitate, servants snatched the platters away, to return with roasts hot from the oven and basted with different sauces. The partly-carved viands were taken outside, where the *apartadores* gorged themselves to suffocation.

At last even hungry men could eat no more.

The table was cleared, and fruit and cordials set out. As the stoppers were pulled loose, new perfumes—wild orange, peach, mountain blackberry, sun-browned apricot—mingled with the fragrance of dewy night-cut flowers placed in the table's middle.

The tapers lighted the swarthy features of the Californians, turned the ivory skins of their wives a warm

hue. Fra Juan, happy again in the happiness of others, contented in the vision of virginity he had seen, smiled gravely while the two brothers—Estevan and Andres—argued with him both at once about something which had happened many years ago, and had never been of any importance to any one.

Doña Luisa called to don Patricio, "What happened on your ride? We are all anxious to hear . . ."

The Irishman cleared his throat.

"What happened? Well, I will explain. First——"

Wayne, the Englishman, knew the Celt. "First and last, we drove him into the sea, and that is all there was to it," he said.

"You can not stop me that way, my boy," Callanan grinned. "Over the hills Arthur and I pounded after him. He went fast, and we went fast . . . and . . . well, perhaps this is not the time for all details. However, señorita Hilarita—pardon, *señora!*—this Marin will play no more tricks about Buena Esperanza. Nor need you fear him again, Fra Juan." The Irishman paused, and then said, "We caught him at the *estero** where it empties into the bay."

"What did you do to the wretch?" señora de la Torre demanded.

Don Patricio said sadly, "We begged his pardon for causing him such a long ride."

When the laughter subsided, Fra Juan muttered, "He always hated me. Even when I cared for his

* It is commonly believed that Marin swam to the islands bearing his name in San Pablo Bay, but there is nothing to prove this, and the weight of evidence is that he was killed on the bay shore opposite the islands.

sick, he hated me. I . . . I must pray for his soul doubly . . . he knew no better . . .”

An *apartador*, outside in the moonlight, began to sing:

“Hide thy face
Beneath thy fan;
Peer across its edge at me . . .”

Every one in the room turned toward Hilarita. All knew the old love song; it made all think of the same thing.

Her face rosy, Hilarita drew the hand Ricardo was holding above the table-top, where all might see. “We are very happy,” she said.

Don Andres, visibly affected, jumped to his feet.

“And why not?” he thundered. “You are master and mistress of the grassy hills and the flowery valleys; as kings and queens you dominate——”

Don Estevan calmly jerked him down to the bench.

“Brother,” he shouted, “I have stood a great deal this night, but if you try to harangue us again about the glory of California, I will begin to wish that you were still Silencio.”

“Or Silencio still, eh? Well, Silencio served a purpose . . .”

What purpose none knew better than Hilarita and Ricardo.

Light from great knots of pitch-pine fastened to tall poles caused the windows to brighten. Soft seductive music drifted in from the dancing-place under the laurel.

"Hide thy face
Beneath thy fan;
Peer across its edge at me . . ."

"Estevan will not allow me to talk," the irrepressible Andres cried, leaping a second time to his feet, and eluding his brother's extended hand, "but I have not forgotten how to dance. Doña Luisa, we will make a handsome couple, you and I. Shall we teach these children the proper way to do a *madrillena*?" As he spoke he slipped behind her, and broke a perfume-filled egg over her head.

While the *rancheros* applauded his dexterity, señora de la Torre, vastly pleased at the attention, and completely herself again, glared at her meek husband, saying, "What a man you would make for some appreciative woman, don Andres!"

Don José's cup had been filled and emptied many times.

"Don Andres," he said seriously, "I wish that you had found one . . . before I did!"

Servants found it necessary to pound Don Patricio on the back after that; his fellow-Californians hammered on the table until don Andres led the hot-cheeked doña Luisa from the room with the greatest of gravity, doing little steps when her back was turned.

Hilarita danced under the laurel trees with don José, with don Andres and don Patricio, who took delight in reminding her that he really should have been the lucky man, to which she retorted calmly that he was really thinking how lucky he was in not being a martyr. He laughed so loudly that all wondered what he was

about. After she had danced with all save Ricardo, she was at last permitted to stand opposite him.

Very sedately they danced, since they knew all were watching; round and round they turned, now close, now at arm's length; at each near approach, as the music beat faster, they breathed more rapidly.

As they swung together for a delicious, barely-tasted moment, almost the sweeter for that, Ricardo whispered, "I have so much to tell you . . . so much, dearest 'Rita. . . ."

White silk and bright jacket blended closely in that instant; man and girl were like a swaying tiger-lily of the hills in the mysterious, flaring light.

Hilarita pressed close to him: she whispered flutteringly, demurely, "Yes . . . my husband. . . ."

He smiled; Hilarita's eyes, demure as ever, became very bright; the Californians could hear them both as they laughed.

It was don Andres who missed them, although he did not see the exact instant when they had danced into the shadows, and, hand in hand still (and laughing), had sped away from the dancing-place. He kept the pleasant fact to himself as long as he could hold it, but finally was forced to seek out don Estevan and Fra Juan.

"Don José's most dutiful, lovely and affectionate wife does not know that they have disappeared," he confided in as low a voice as he could manage, "but Hilarita and Ricardo are up somewhere under the stars, and, if I know lovers, in the stars as well. A happy time, eh? And, if it comes to that, for all of us."

The three men watched the brilliant colors of the dancers flash under the torches: crimson, scarlet, ultramarine, yellow; the white of the women's dresses turned to opalescent hues, the black of their mantillas the sheen of warm ebony; from their high combs bits of light sparkled. . . .

Each was deep in his own thoughts.

Don Andres muttered, "California!" and nothing more.

At last don Estevan said, "Some day their children, and the children of their children, will dance under the laurel. Buena Esperanza will always be held by our blood, Andres. . . ."

His throat tight, don Andres shouted, "*Santiago y del Valle!*" and the laurel leaves trembled from his powerful battle-cry.

Don Estevan glanced toward the line of dark ridges.

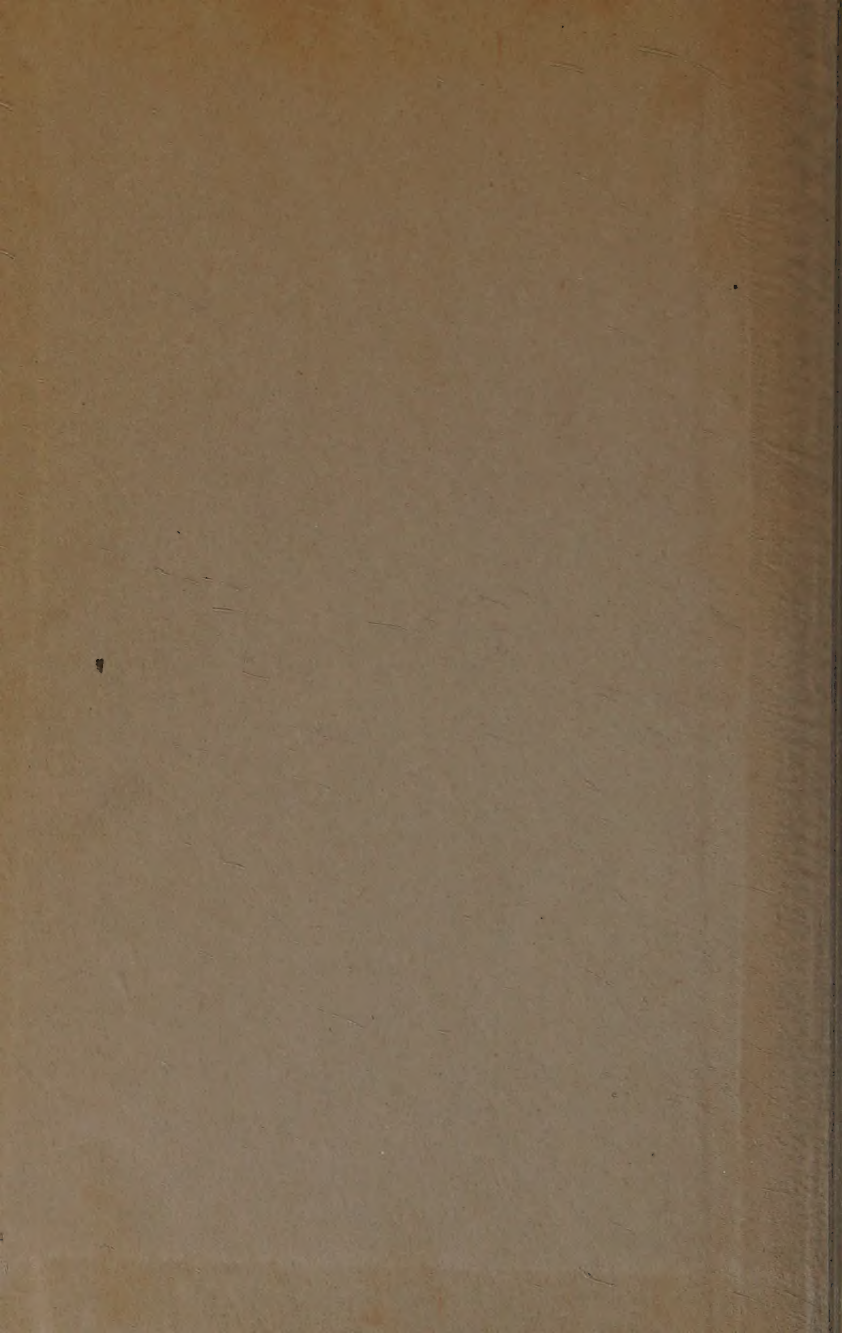
Up in the pear-orchard he saw, or thought he saw, a dim white shape, which, as he watched, moved, and then seemed to vanish. He did not give over looking, and the pale figure appeared again. He was positive of what he saw: "Hilarita is in his arms. They are very happy." Aloud, he said, thinking more of that than of what he had said to the other two, "Always!"

Past them the Californians danced: yellow and scarlet and blue and flashing white . . .

Fra Juan, his gaunt frame erect, smiled at the two del Valles.

All he said was, "I will pray for it, my sons."







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